SANDGROUSE

Volume 23 (1) *2001*

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

OSME

OSME

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

OSME was founded in 1978 as the successor to the Ornithological Society of Turkey. Its primary aims are:

- To collect, collate, and publish data on all aspects of the birds of the Middle East.
- To promote an interest in ornithology and bird conservation throughout the Middle East.
- To develop productive working relationships with other governmental and non-governmental organisations with an interest in conservation and/or natural history in the region.

MEMBERSHIP

OSME is open to all, and its membership spans over 40 countries.

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Write to the Membership Secretary at the address below for a membership form detailing methods of payment and also rates for Family, Supporting and Life membership. For any other information on the Society, write to the Secretary at the same address.

PUBLICATIONS

OSME publishes a scientific journal, *Sandgrouse*, containing papers, news and features on all aspects of Middle Eastern ornithology. Published twice yearly, it is issued free to members. Further copies are available for sale from OSME.

MEETINGS

An Annual General Meeting is held in London at which guest speakers provide new perspectives on ornithology in the region. There are also occasional special meetings, some taking place outside the UK.

PROJECTS

OSME organises field expeditions to collect data on birds in little-known parts of the region and in areas where OSME can assist by teaming up with local groups.

The Conservation & Research Committee grants funds to valuable field projects and desk studies which further knowledge and conservation of birds in the region. Grants have been awarded to over 30 projects since the Conservation & Research Fund was set up in 1982.

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B. Behrouzi-Rad
Dr Saeed Mohamed
Anis Mouasher
Dr Omar Al-Saghier
Dr Yossi Leshem
Richard Porter

COUNCIL AS AT MAY 2001:

D. Balmer
(co-opted)

K. Betton - information@osme.org
Information Officer (co-opted)

C. G. Bradshaw - c&r@osme.org
Conservation & Research

S. Busuttil - iba@osme.org

R. Daniel
Librarian

A. Grieve - chairman@osme.org
Chairman

Dr D. Harvey - features@osme.org
Features Editor, Sandgrouse

R. P. Martins
Turkey Bird Report (co-opted)

D. Moore - publicity@osme.org
Publicity

A. J. Morris - fundraiser@osme.org

S. Parr

O. Roberts - secretary@osme.org
Secretary

H. I. Scott
Publications Officer (co-opted)

F. E. Warr - sales@osme.org
Sales & Mailing (co-opted)

A. J. Warr - membership@osme.org
Treasurer & Membership

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c/o THE LODGE, SANDY, BEDFORDSHIRE SG19 2DL, UK
OSME WEB SITE - http://www.osme.org

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Editor
Guy M. Kirwan

Features Editor
Derek Harvey

Assistant Editor
Ian J. Andrews

Editorial Committee
Michael Blair,
Paul Goriup,
Mike Jennings,
Rodney Martins,
Peter L. Meininger
& Dr Stephen Newton

Photographic Editor
Paul Doherty

Design & Production
Harry I. Scott

Identification Consultants
C. G. Bradshaw,
Arnoud B. van den Berg
& Steve Madge

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Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo*,
taken by *Paul Doherty*
at Eilat, Israel, March 1989.

OSME is grateful for sponsorship from Julian Francis towards the cost of printing the colour photographs inside this issue.

OSME News

FIRST ARABIAN ORNITHOLOGICAL AND CONSERVATION CONFERENCE

The first Arabian Ornithological and Conservation Conference was held at Manama, Bahrain, on 21–25 October 2000, under the Patronage of His Royal Highness the Emir of Bahrain, Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa. The conference programme, which was superbly organised by OSME member Howard King, started with a two-day field visit to a jewel in the Arabian Gulf crown, the Hawar Islands. Caspian Terns *Sterna caspia* were starting to nest on some of the islands, White-cheeked Terns *S. repressa* were still present but had long since finished breeding and Sooty Falcons *Falco concolor* still attending large fledged young were some of the highlights. The undoubted icing on the bird cake was a visit to a large, flat, sandy desert island where Socotra Cormorants *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* were congregating prior to their breeding season. The Hawar Islands support up to 10% of the world population, of c. 220,000 pairs.

The conference was formerly opened, on 24 October, by H. E. The Minister of Housing, Municipalities and Environment, Sheikh Khalid Bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, and delegates from throughout the Middle East attended, including Adnan Budeiri from BirdLife International, Middle East & Central Asia Division, as well as representatives from NCWCD, in Saudi Arabia, the Commission of Environmental Research in UAE, the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency and Palestine Wildlife Society. Simon Awad, from the Palestine Ornithological and Biodiversity Centre, also attended despite travel difficulties. Two of OSME's Vice Presidents Dr Omar Al-Saghir, of Yemen and Dr Saeed Abdulla Mohamed, of Bahrain, gave excellent presentations and the role of OSME was highlighted in a talk by the OSME chairman.

Recommendations for protecting the internationally important wildlife biodiversity of the Hawar Islands as a sustainable resource for future generations were presented to the government of Bahrain following the conference. It is hoped that in holding this imaginative and forward-looking meeting an abiding desire for future cooperation between ornithologists and conservationists in the region has been fostered. Congratulations are due to all concerned, particularly Howard King for organising such an important event, with the assistance of staff at the National Commission for Wildlife Protection in Bahrain. OSME thanks His Royal Highness the Emir of Bahrain, Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, for the honour and privilege of visiting Bahrain and the bird-rich islands of Hawar.

Andrew Grieve and Tony Morris

OSME T-SHIRT: ORIGINAL PAINTING BY IAN WALLACE FOR AUCTION

OSME produced a newly designed T-shirt in time for the British Birdwatching Fair in August 2000. The original painting by Ian (DIM) Wallace of the Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor* against a blazing sunset with sandgrouse *Pterocles* sp. flying by, based on his experiences of Azraq Oasis in Jordan, is now for sale. The painting is mounted and framed, and will be sold by closed auction to the highest bidder. Bids can be submitted by post to OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, U. K., or by e-mail to iba@osme.org, or by fax to Simon Busuttil on 01797 321962. Bids must have been made by 3 July 2001 to be eligible and the winner will be announced at the OSME AGM on 14 July 2001. The colourful high-quality limited edition T-shirt is available from OSME in L (Large) or XL (Extra Large) for UK£11.50 inclusive of surface postage.

MIDDLE EAST BIRDING AND CONSERVATION ORGANISATIONS

In *Sandgrouse* 18 (2), a directory of Middle East birding organisations was published. Five years on it is out of date and incomplete.

OSME intends to publish a revised directory in *Sandgrouse* as soon as possible, and it would be a considerable assistance if those with up-to-date information could send it to Derek Harvey, Lancefield House, 10 St Saviour's Lane, Padstow, Cornwall PL28 8BD, UK. Fax: +44 (0)1841 533130. E-mail: doc.harvey@virgin.net.

OBITUARY: DAVID A. RUSHFORTH

Words cannot convey the sorrow felt by a broad cross-section of people at the passing of Dave Rushforth. He was the ultimate gentleman in the accepted sense, but also a gentle man in the literal sense. His cheerful and helpful demeanour was a constant inspiration to all that knew him and I, like many others, benefitted greatly from his guidance. Although serious at times, he had a warm sense of humour, which made him an ideal traveling companion while camping in eastern Turkey or driving through his beloved Israel. A founder member of Flamborough Ornithological Group, member of OSME and the driving force behind the East Yorkshire Ringing Group, his tireless efforts will be sorely missed. Our thoughts go to his wife Christine and family, who can take comfort that he will never be forgotten.

Mike Pearson

NEWS & INFORMATION

compiled by Derek Moore and Guy M. Kirwan

The aim of this section is to inform readers about events in the OSME region. It relies on members and others supplying relevant news and information. If you have anything concerning birds, conservation or development in the OSME area please send it to News and Information, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, U. K.

This section is not intended as a definitive report or write-up of the projects concerned. Many of the projects are sponsored; such support is appreciated but is not generally given acknowledgement here.

GENERAL

Raptors at risk The Proceedings of the 5th World Conference on Birds of Prey, held in South Africa in August 1998, were published jointly by the World Working Group on Birds of Prey (WWGBP) and Hancock House (USA & Canada) in June 2000 under the title *Raptors at risk*. This impressive volume of nearly 900 pages comprises 89 scientific papers by leading experts worldwide and covers the broadest possible spectrum of current research into the biology, ecology and conservation of both diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey. All advance orders were dispatched on publication; further copies can be obtained at US$48.50, UK£30, DM90, FF280, post free from WWGBP, or major booksellers. More details can be found at the WWGBP web site (http://www.raptors-international.de). (Source: *Raptor News* October 2000.)

Second Middle East Falcon Research Group Conference on Saker Falcon and Houbara Bustard With regard to this conference, held 1–4 July 2000, at Ulan Bator, Mongolia, a list of the 53 participants from nine countries, together with their addresses and the conference programme is now available at www.falcons.co.uk/mefrg/. (Source: *Raptor News* October 2000.)

Arabian Wildlife *re-launched* Issue nine of *Arabian Wildlife* has been published and is better than ever, packed with high-quality photographs and articles. Peter Vine, the editor, and his team of Michelle Wright and Jane Stark are to be congratulated on a superb issue. Of interest to OSME members is a site guide to the bird-rich Barr Al Hikman, in Oman, and an item on sandgrouse by OSME members and internationally renowned photographers, Hanne and Jens Eriksen.

Superb photographs by the husband-and-wife team sumptuously illustrate these and other articles, including features on turtles, cetaceans, Arabian Leopards, the Oryx, chameleons, Date Palms and wild cats. This publication deserves the support of all involved in birdwatching and conservation in Arabia. Further details are available at: http://www.arabianwildlife.com, which features some excellent articles from previous issues. Subscription enquiries should be directed to the Subscriptions Dept., Trident Media, A3 Station House, Clifden, Co. Galway, Ireland. E-mail: admin@tridentpress.ie. (Contributed by Andrew Grieve.)

Threats to the vultures of Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa, and strategies for an International Action Plan A disease factor is decimating populations of Indian White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* and both species of long-billed vulture *G. indicus* and *G. tenuirostris* in India. In Nepal, at least some populations of White-backed Vulture are rapidly declining; there is no information on any changes in the status of Himalayan Griffon *G. himalayensis*. Available information is also insufficient to determine whether the same disease factor played a role in the earlier collapse of vulture populations in countries east of India, but it is plausible. The first symptoms of the disease have been observed within Indian White-backed Vultures in Pakistan. Traditionally 25–30 Griffon Vulture *G. fulvus* have wintered in Keoladeo National Park in eastern Rajasthan. Only two were recorded in 1997–98, and none has been seen since. Griffon Vulture ranges west to Europe; in north-east Africa its range overlaps with that of Rüppell's Vulture *G. rueppellii*, whose range, in turn, overlaps in east Africa with that of African White-backed Vulture *G. africanus*. A westward spread of the disease through Pakistan and beyond now appears to be inevitable.

Preliminary studies in India have not detected any of the viruses, or other disease factors known to infect either domestic or wild birds. The immediate priority therefore is to make available tissues of infected birds to any laboratory in the world that can contribute to the characterisation of the disease factor. Current regulations in India prohibit the export of biological samples containing genetic material, but programmes presently being developed with the participation of The Peregrine Fund, in Nepal and Pakistan, are expected to be capable of providing such material to the international community in the future. Meanwhile, delays threaten the well being, if not the existence, of one or more species occurring in India.

If the agent proves to be a virus, presumably one that has 'jumped' from another species that is its traditional host, development of a crude vaccine is plausible. Laboratories interested in undertaking such a project need to be identified. Collection of some fresh eggs of Indian White-backed Vulture, in Pakistan, in 2001 should be considered, to provide potential culture media. Development of a network of facilities for maintaining, and in some cases propagating, vultures in captivity was to be actively discussed at a workshop in Delhi, in October 2000, sponsored by the Bombay Natural History Society. A vaccine will require testing. Experiments are needed to determine the pathways of transmission of the disease from one individual to another. The development of tests for the presence of antibodies is a prerequisite to determining whether surviving vultures have acquired immunity. A prerequisite for the location of at least one of these facilities must be the availability of a blanket permit for the expeditious import and export of biological samples. A simultaneous consideration is that adequate numbers of each species be in captivity under conditions that prevent transmission of the disease. Recognition that the two forms of Indian Long-billed Vulture are separate biological species increases the scope of such a project.

Surveys should be undertaken throughout the nesting season to determine the timing and extent of mortalities, and to systematically acquire data on the progress of the disease. Critical species and sites include colonies of the cliff-nesting *Gyps indicus* in peninsular India, groups of tree-nesting *G. tenuirostris* in northern India, and one or more groups of Indian White-backed Vulture in Nepal and Pakistan. The latter were considered abundant on a recent visit to the area; during the corresponding period in 1999, however, vultures were also found to be abundant in western Rajasthan where they have since become rare. Pakistan is

therefore considered a critical area for short-term studies. Moreover it is *the* area where Indian White-backed Vulture has most contact with Griffon Vulture.

Searches for and censuses of Griffon Vulture colonies in the countries between India and the Middle East should also be considered a short-term priority. Not only are these the next populations most likely to be affected, they are also the pathway of the disease to the Middle East, Europe and Africa. The remnant populations of vultures in Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia also deserve study. If the disease contributed to their population collapse, their continued survival may be due to the development of resistance; another possibility, however, is that because of comparative rarity or isolation of populations, they were never exposed to the disease. Both Indian White-backed and *Gyps tenuirostris* occurred in these areas. It is particularly important to determine whether remnant populations of *G. tenuirostris* survive in these areas. The combined efforts of specialists on birds of prey and captive propagation, as well as veterinarians, pathologists, microbiologists or virologists will be necessary to minimise the impacts of the disease, which may be well established in other species but is new to the *Gyps* vultures. Efforts to reintroduce Griffon Vultures to France and Italy, to maintain their populations in Spain and Israel, and to maintain populations of vultures in several African countries, should not have been in vain. In India, vultures have traditionally disposed of carcasses in the cities, villages and the countryside, reducing the risk of disease and maintaining sanitation. It is an understatement that identification of the disease and the development of at least a partial remedy are urgent priorities. (Source: *Raptor News* October 2000.)

Nerve poison uncontrolled in the environment Methomyl is registered as an insecticide under the commercial name of Lannate and is freely available in horticultural shops, e.g. in Cyprus and Greece. Illegally, high concentrations of Lannate are dissolved in water and offered as baits to animals that are perceived as pest species by farmers. Side-affects of such widespread abuse include a decline in the population of Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* in Crete, which has halved within the last three to four years. (Source: *International Hawkwatcher* 3: 10–17; D. Ristow *in litt.* 2001.)

CYPRUS

The North Cyprus 1999 Bird Report, published by Kuskor (The North Cyprus Society for the Protection of Birds and Nature), is now available. The A4, 62-page report includes a Turkish/Greek gazetteer; systematic list of bird species recorded in 1999; a checklist of the birds of Cyprus; short notes describing Finsch's Wheatear *Oenanthe finschii* wintering on the southern slopes of the Kyrenia mountain range, Hobby *Falco subbuteo* as a breeding summer visitor to Cyprus, and the coasting migration of gulls *Larus* spp. at Zeytin Burnu; census counts of breeding birds in north Cyprus in 1999; observations of the autumn migration of waterbirds along the north coast of Cyprus, 1991–1999; ringing recoveries; and a report on butterflies. The report is priced at UK£8 plus UK£2 postage (equivalent in DM, US$, or TL accepted). Cheques should be made payable to Kuskor, at PK 634, Girne, Mersin 10, Turkey. (Mersin 10, Turkey, is the postal code for North Cyprus.) Phone: (0392) 815 7337. Fax: (0392) 815 1819. E-mail: ncspb@iecnc.org. The publication of the report has been sponsored and all proceeds will be used to aid the work of the society. (Source: Peter Flint *in litt.* September 2000.)

Bird killing continues in Cyprus Despite much campaigning over the last decade, recent reports illustrate that the illegal trapping and killing of migrant birds is still rife in Cyprus. These reports not only tell of the widespread use of lime sticks but also mist-nets. The main area concerned is around Ayia Napa, ironically on land controlled by British Forces. Visitors to Cyprus should be warned that birdwatchers who have attempted to intervene have suffered threats and, in at least one case, physical violence.

The Sovereign Base police acknowledge that the killing of these birds is illegal but claim that the large-scale operation makes it impossible for them to stop it. Local police not only ignore the illegal practices but appear to condone them and even admit to enjoying eating pickled Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla*. More recently and surprisingly, the Cyprus Hunting Association has wholly endorsed the view that

the illegal killing must halt immediately. Chairman Tassos Lordos considers that most of the horrific slaughter is performed for monetary considerations and although he supports enforcement of the law he doubts whether it can be totally eradicated. The continued illegal slaughter of birds is a national disgrace for a country currently making energetic overtures to join the European Union. Every effort should be made to exclude Cyprus from the Union until these acts are brought to an end. *Birdwatching* magazine is considering a major campaign to bring the illegal trapping to the attention of the maximum audience, which may include persuading bird tours to boycott the island. This method was useful in a previous campaign, led by Bill Oddie, to outlaw the spring shooting of migrants. (Source: *Birdwatching* December 2000 and January 2001.)

Cyprus Bird Information Centre This free service, funded by the Cyprus Ornithological Society (1957) and available to all birdwatchers, is relocating due to the closure, for maintenance, of the Apollo Hotel, in Kato Paphos. This is also a suitable time to modify the previous *modus operandi*. The new service will run from the premises of 'Photo Optic Land Ltd.', also in Kato Paphos, on Apostolou Pavlou Avenue, near the harbour T-junction and signposted as 'Photo Demetrakis'. The owner, Christos Spyrou, will provide the service free of charge. There will be a daily sightings board outside the shop, updated via e-mail to Christos as and when required, and a Cyprus Ornithological Society (1957) representative will be available 08.00–09.00 each Tuesday and Thursday to provide help and assistance. The latest checklist will also be available at the shop. The service will commence 12 March 2001. For the service to be as up-to-date as possible it requires the assistance of all birdwatchers to phone their sightings to Birdline or to e-mail Jeff Gordon: j.gordon@cytanet.com.cy. Birdline Cyprus will continue, as before, on Paphos (06) 270447. (Source: Jeff Gordon *in litt.* February 2001.)

EGYPT

Bird hunting threat in Egyptian 'protected areas' In autumn 2000, bird hunting was permitted at Zaranik Protected Area, an Important Bird Area (IBA), part of a Ramsar site and a Specially Protected Area, under the Barcelona Convention, in Egypt. Earlier in the season hunting in Zaranik had been restricted, based on the orders of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency in accordance with the law prohibiting hunting inside nature reserves. But the Governor of north Sinai, bowing to public pressure, later authorised bird hunting at Zaranik. At another protected site, the Governor of El Fayoum is requesting Egyptian authorities to permit bird hunting at Lake Qarun and repeal its Protected Area status. If granted, it would be the first time a Protected Area had been cancelled in Egypt, thus setting a dangerous precedent. Lake Qarun is an Important Bird Area (IBA), internationally renowned for its wintering waterfowl. In the 1980s, visiting Italian and Maltese hunters killed large numbers of birds there, but a BirdLife campaign led to hunting being prohibited and bird populations have recovered. The lake is also under threat from development, which affects both the important bird habitats and ecotourism plans for the site. Bird hunting is widespread in the autumn along Egypt's Mediterranean coast, from Libya to Gaza. The main target species is Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*, but millions of birds are caught, including globally threatened species like the Corncrake *Crex crex*.

ISRAEL

Rarity reports For updates on rarities, as well as very useful information regarding birdwatching in Israel, it is worth visiting the Birding Israel web site at http://www.geocities.com/birdingisrael. Rarity sightings should be reported to Ido Tsurim at tsurim@bgumail.bgu.ac.il. (Source: Nir Sapir *in litt.* October 2000.)

JORDAN

Ringing in Jordan The first ringing activities in Jordan commenced in September 2000, in the Jordan Valley, initially using Palestinian rings. It is hoped that a Jordanian scheme and station will be established and that Jordanian rings will be used soon. The first bird to be captured and ringed was a Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*. For further information please contact Dr Fares Khoury, Jordan Ornithological Centre, Hashemite University, Zerqa, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. (Source: Fares Khoury *in litt.* September 2000.)

OMAN

New Oman Bird List Edition five of the *Official List of the Birds of the Sultanate of Oman* has recently been published. Produced in a larger format than previously, and with distribution maps and occurrence histograms, this handy volume is a must for anyone travelling to Oman. It reveals that, by September 2000, 463 species had been officially admitted to the Oman list, which is notable considering how few observers are present at any one time in this exciting country. You can obtain a copy, for UK£7 including post and packing, from The Oman Bird Records Committee, P. O. Box 246, Muscat 113, Sultanate of Oman. (Source: Jens Eriksen *in litt.*)

TURKEY

Great Bustards and White-headed Ducks Four different display grounds of Great Bustard *Otis tarda*, with a total of 83 individuals, were discovered in the Tuz Gölü basin during surveys in spring 2000. The survey was conducted by DHKD in partnership with the joint Working Group International Waterbird and Wetland, with some financial support from OSME. This is a larger population than has been recently suspected to occur in this region, but nonetheless concerns for bustard populations in the country remain high with strong circumstantial evidence for a significant decrease in numbers over the past two decades. In a further DHKD initiative, funded by BirdLife International and commenced in August 2000, a White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* monitoring scheme at Burdur Gölü, Akyatan Gölü and Kızılırmak Delta is designed to assess numbers of migrant and wintering individuals in these three Important Bird Areas (IBAs). (Source: *BirdLife In Europe* 5 (3): 5.)

REQUESTS *for* INFORMATION

Help with Mediterranean Gull ringing programme required

A Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus* colour-ringing programme is ongoing in Greece, Turkey and Ukraine (using black rings). During the 2000 breeding season the following totals were colour ringed: Ukraine 566 chicks, 91 breeding birds; Turkey 77 chicks; and Greece 148 chicks. Others have probably been marked in the Sea of Azov. All are fitted with a metal ring, as well as a black, coded, colour ring. A total of 3145 black rings has now been used (Ukraine 2245, Turkey 488 and Greece 412). All birdwatchers active on the Mediterranean coast (especially in Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain, France, Morocco and Tunisia) are requested to take notes on colour-ringed Mediterranean Gull they may find, including those with rings that could not be read. As yet, there have very few sightings from the Mediterranean coast, except north Italy. Additional information on the various Mediterranean Gull programmes can be found at http://go.to/medgull or http://www.ping.be/cr-birding/cr-birding.htm, or by contacting Renaud.Flamant@skynet.be. Reports of black rings should also be sent to Renaud Flamant, and observers will receive details of the life history of such birds in return.

Syrian Serin study

Syrian Serins *Serinus syriacus* were colour-ringed in summer 2000 as a part of a long-term study of the species' populations and distribution in Israel. All observations of ringed (not only colour-ringed) Syrian Serins from the country and elsewhere can be sent to Nir Sapir at nirsa@bgumail.bgu.ac.il. Please provide the following details: date, locality, time of day, habitat, general behaviour (foraging, pre-roosting etc.), flock size, other species present and the colour scheme (most individuals were ringed with one colour ring on the left tarsus and a metal ring on the right tarsus).

Chokpak ringing station

Help is needed to man Chokpak ringing station, in south Kazakhstan, in spring and autumn. Species that are regularly handled include Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*,

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*, Rufous Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Calandra *Melanocorypha calandra* and Bimaculated Larks *M. bimaculata*, Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus*, Pine *Emberiza leucocephalos*, Grey-necked *E. buchanani* and Red-headed Buntings *E. bruniceps*. Scarcer species occasionally trapped include Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Striated Scops Owl *Otus brucei*, Small Skylark *Alauda gulgula*, Eversmann's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythronotus*, Upcher's *Hippolais languida*, Orphean *Sylvia hortensis* and Paddyfield Warblers *Acrocepahlus agricola*, Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* and Mongolian Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes mongolicus*.

Special excursions can be organised to Aksu-Dzabagly Natural Reserve where more exotic species such as Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*, Black-throated *Prunella atrogularis* and Brown Accentors *P. fulvescens*, Blue-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus*, Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*, Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* and White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carnipes* occur. The nearby Karatau Mountains hold a broad variety of raptors, as well as passerines such as Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronota*. At Ters-Astchibulak reservoir, Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* can be observed along with Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus* and various species of waders, terns and waterfowl.

A ringing licence is not necessary, but some experience of handling birds for ringing is an advantage. There are two ways to reach Chokpak, one is as an independent traveller; accommodation is provided in tents and a resident cook provides all meals. Alternatively, a small charge, US$25 per day, is made to stay at the ringing station. Arrangements can be made for visitors to be met at Almaty airport, or to travel by train to Chokpak railway station, close to the ringing station. Please contact Edward Gavrilov at gavr@zool2.academ.alma-ata.su for more information.

Alternatively, all-inclusive (except insurance) spring and autumn visits for 2–3 weeks can be arranged with Flamborough Ornithological Group (FOG) with the prime objective of assisting with ringing at Chokpak, but also to survey potential IBAs (Important Bird Areas). Most of the specialities and endemics of the area are usually encountered including Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*, Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus* and White-browed Tit-warbler *Leptopoecile sophiae*. The cost is c. UK£1,200, including flights, all transport, food, visas etc, camping while in the field and stays at reasonable hotels in Almaty during transit. The 2001 autumn trip has many participants already but further visits are planned for spring and/or autumn 2002 and beyond. For further information contact Mike Pearson at Primrose Cottage, Northstead Court, Flamborough, East Yorks, Y015 1PS, U. K. Tel: 01262 851606; fax: 01262 850888.

Ringers required

Experienced ringers are required for voluntary work at the Kfar Ruppin ringing station, in north-east Israel. Large numbers of migrant passerines are caught at the site, including many Near East specialties, such as Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*, Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* and others. Ringers are needed for autumn 2001 (September–November). A minimum period of three weeks is required. Accommodation and food are provided at kibbutz Kfar Ruppin. Applicants should send their curriculum vitae to Dan Alon, manager of the Israel Ornithological Centre, at ioc@netvision.net.il, or to David Glasner, manager of the Kfar Ruppin Birdwatching Centre, at dglasner@kfar-ruppin.org.il.

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Radde's Accentor *Prunella ocularis* in northern Iran

KEN G. ROGERS

The Lar Valley in the central Elburz Mountains of northern Iran was used as a ringing site in the 1970s. Information from this study (extracted from recently relocated notebooks) is presented here. Radde's Accentor *Prunella ocularis* was one of the most commonly captured species in the Lar Valley from mid-September to early October. It is thought that most were young birds on altitudinal migration, although the capture of an adult in active primary moult suggests that locally bred individuals may have been present. Biometrics are summarised; they suggest the possibility of geographical size variation in Radde's Accentor. A list of all species caught in the study area is appended.

INTRODUCTION

Radde's Accentor is poorly known. *BWP* (Cramp 1988) presents morphometric data from specimens of just nine individuals from the West Palearctic region and on 34 'mainly' from the Zagros Mountains in south-west Iran. Weights were available for only two individuals. Probably the principal reason for this paucity of data is the relative inaccessibility of much of the species' range. Radde's Accentor is an altitudinal migrant occurring at 2500–3500 metres in summer, descending to 1000 metres in winter (Hollom *et al.* 1988). D. A. Scott (pers. comm.) reports it to to be 'quite common in Iran, both in summer (at high altitudes in all the major mountain ranges—up to the snow line) and in winter (desert oases in the north, e.g. [Dasht-e-] Kavir, and hill ranges in the south e.g. Kuh-e-Geno near Bandar Abbas)'. Its skulking behaviour makes the species difficult to locate even in suitable areas.

This paper summarises data obtained from 51 Radde's Accentors during a ringing study undertaken in the central Elburz Mountains of northern Iran in 1975–1978. The field data for most of these were recorded in my field notebooks, which only 'surfaced' recently from their 'hiding place' of the past 22 years.

In total, 709 individuals of 38 species were ringed (see Appendix). Ninety-six were Radde's Accentor. Only one species, Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, with 161 was caught in greater numbers; Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti* was next with 70, followed by Green Warbler *Phylloscopus nitidus* with 34. All were trapped in mist-nets at one site in the Lar Valley. The

Plate 1. Typical view of the Lar Valley, Iran; the ringing site was at the foot of the curved ridge in the sunlight. (*Ken.G. Rogers*)

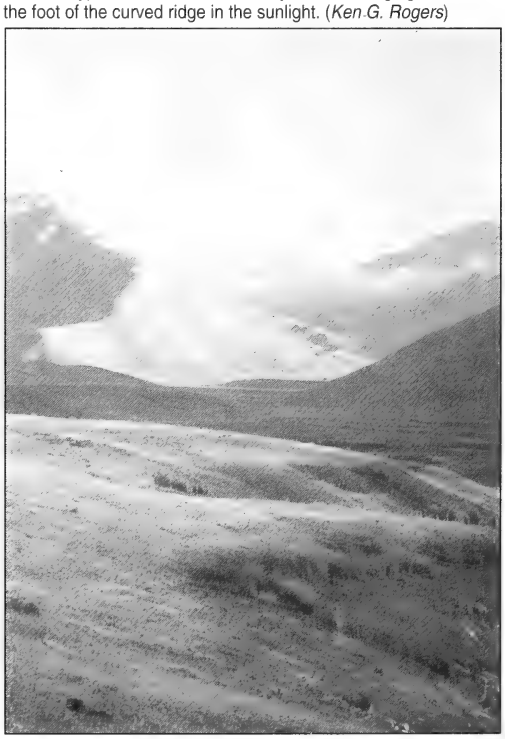

Plate 2. Radde's Accentor *Prunella ocularis*, Lar Valley, Iran. (*Ken G. Rogers*)

valley is situated directly below and south of Mount Damavand, which at 5671 metres is Iran's highest peak. The site, 30 km west-northwest of Polour, which is on the Tehran to Amol road (35°57'N 51°56'E; altitude 2450 metres), was principally visited to trap migrants in autumn. It was inaccessible during the spring migration season due to the melting of winter snows. Mostly occupied by grassy flats, rather bare in autumn after the heat of summer and grazed by sheep and goats, the valley floor supports occasional copses of low trees, which attracted migrants that had just crossed the highest ridge within the range. An informal account of birding and ringing in Iran is presented in Rogers (1992).

METHODS

All individuals caught were ringed, and aged where possible (Spencer 1976). Most were weighed, had their wing lengths (maximum chord) measured and primary moult recorded if moulting (Spencer 1976). No information was then available on the slight differences in plumage between the sexes of Radde's Accentors reported by Cramp (1988), nor on ageing, which was presumably performed according to general principles and knowledge of related species.

The sample of Radde's Accentors is sufficiently large to permit statistical analysis (SHEBA programs and later developments, Rogers 1995a, 1995b) to be used to distinguish wing length differences between the sexes. The data in Cramp (1988) demonstrate that wing lengths (maximum chord) of males are generally larger than those of females in all accentor *Prunella* species, although there is considerable size overlap between the sexes.

STATISTICAL DETAIL

SHEBA 'separates the sexes'. It makes maximum likelihood estimates of the number of each sex in the sample and, for each sex, the parameters (means and standard deviations) of the measurement considered. Normal distributions are assumed, as are equal coefficients of variation (ratio of standard deviation to mean) of the measurement for each sex. The separation parameters can be used to estimate the probability that each individual is a male and to use this probability for two purposes: first to estimate for each sex the parameters of other measurements, such as weight, taken from the same individuals and, secondly, to develop a sexing rule or criterion by which sex can be assigned at a given level

Plates 3–5. Views of the Lar Valley, Iran, ringing site. (*Ken G. Rogers*)

of confidence to an individual when all that is known of it is one variable, in this instance wing length. Sample size and the units (nearest millimetre) to which the variable is measured are taken into account when calculating the sexing criterion.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the total numbers of species, individuals and numbers of Radde's Accentors ringed by date (from Argyle 1978), supplemented by data from my notebooks. The list is arranged according to month and date irrespective of year. The individual retrapped on the first visit in 1977 (and again a fortnight later) must have been ringed in 1975 or 1976; details of the initial encounter are unavailable.

With the exception of this retrap, no primary moult was observed. The retrap's moult score was 36, of a possible 50, on 2 September and 41 a fortnight later. Secondary and tail moult were also recorded on 2 September; secondary moult had just commenced (one moulting feather) and tail moult was almost complete (only the outer feathers were not fully grown).

There are too few data to permit age groups to be considered separately. This is unfortunate as young passerines often possess slightly shorter fully grown wings than adults. This has not, however, been demonstated for accentors, possibly due to the difficulty of determining young individuals in this family. Of the 41 whose wing lengths were measured, 32 were recorded as first-years, four as adults (i.e. in their second year or older), and two were fully grown but of unknown age. Fig. 1 illustrates the separation of the sexes on wing length. It gives the observed histogram of wing lengths and the expected distributions for males and females separately and combined. Interestingly, neither the observed nor expected overall histograms are of the double humped form commonly illustrated when sex-related size dimorphism is considered. The flattened form of the histogram is, however, typical of a species with substantial size overlap between the sexes (Rogers & Rogers 1995). Table 2 gives the quantitative separation results together with the data (for adult and first-year birds) given in Cramp (1988).

Table 2 also presents estimated weight distribution parameters for both sexes. The Turkish bird of 25 g is exceptionally heavy compared with the sample considered here, for which weights range between 17.3 g and 22.9 g. No explanation is offered. The individual from southern Iran occupies the middle of this range.

Table 3 offers sexing criteria at three levels of confidence. Given extensive size overlap between the sexes, as here, few

Table 1. Catch totals in the Lar Valley. All but last column from Argyle (1978). Retraps are included in the catch totals. Bracketed numbers include the same different season retrap.

Year	Month	Days	No. of species	No. of birds	No. of Radde's	KGR Radde's
1978	Aug	24–26	14	93	0	0
1977	Aug	25–26	22	89	0	0
1976	Aug	26–27	13	75	0	0
1977	Sep	1–2	13	27	0	(1)
1975	Sep	4–5	22	105	0	0
1978	Sep	7–8	7	40	0	0
1977	Sep	16	6	28	7	(7)
1976	Sep	16–17	12	49	0	0
1977	Sep	30	5	52	38	38
1975	Oct	2	6	64	11	0
1976	Oct	7–8	11	99	40	0

Table 2. Separation of the sexes. Bracketed S.D.s estimated from range (Weatherburn 1962).

Data	No. of males	Male %	Males Mean	Males S.D.	Females Mean	Females S.D.
Wing length (mm)						
This study	41	53.7%	78.1	1.66	74.8	1.59
ex Cramp (1988) East Turkey and north Iran	9	66.7%	78.1	(0.66)	73.5	(0.59)
Iran (mainly Zagros Mts.)	34	70.6%	76.7	2.22	74.1	2.27
Weight (g)						
This study	39	52.2%	20.4	1.25	19.3	1.23
ex Cramp (1988) East Turkey (May)	1		25		-	
South Iran (June)	1		-		20	

Table 3. Sexing criteria based on wing length. Adjustment of limits for sample size and measurement precision are not made at the 50% confidence level.

Confidence level	Upper limit for females	Lower limit for males	Right	Percent D.K.	Wrong
95%	73	80	12.1%	87.8%	0.1%
90%	74	79	29.0%	70.4%	0.6%
50%	76.443	76.443	84.1%	0.0%	15.9%

Plate 6. View of the Lar Valley, Iran, ringing site. (*Ken G. Rogers*)

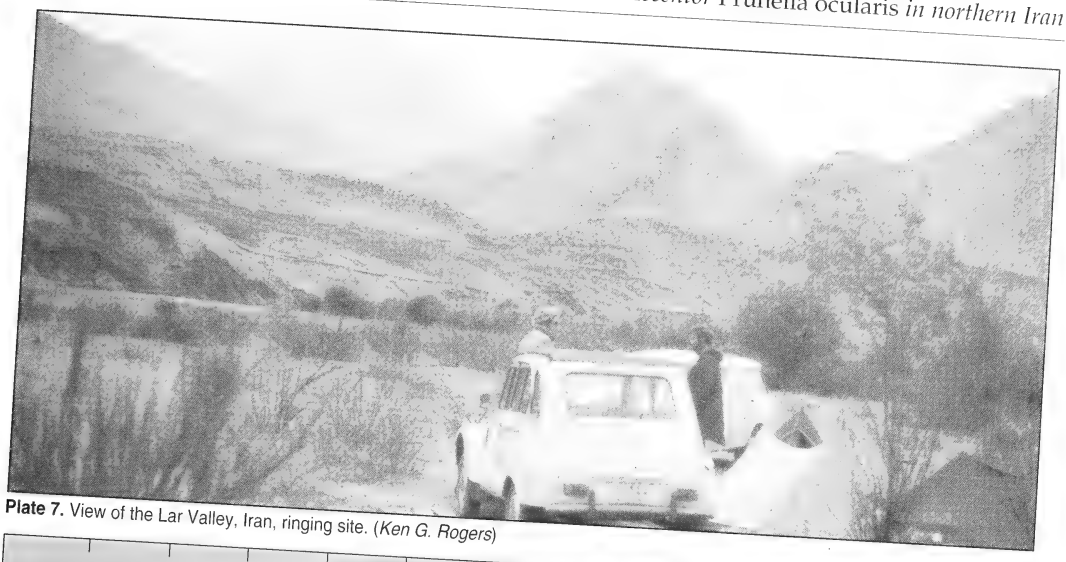

Plate 7. View of the Lar Valley, Iran, ringing site. (*Ken G. Rogers*)

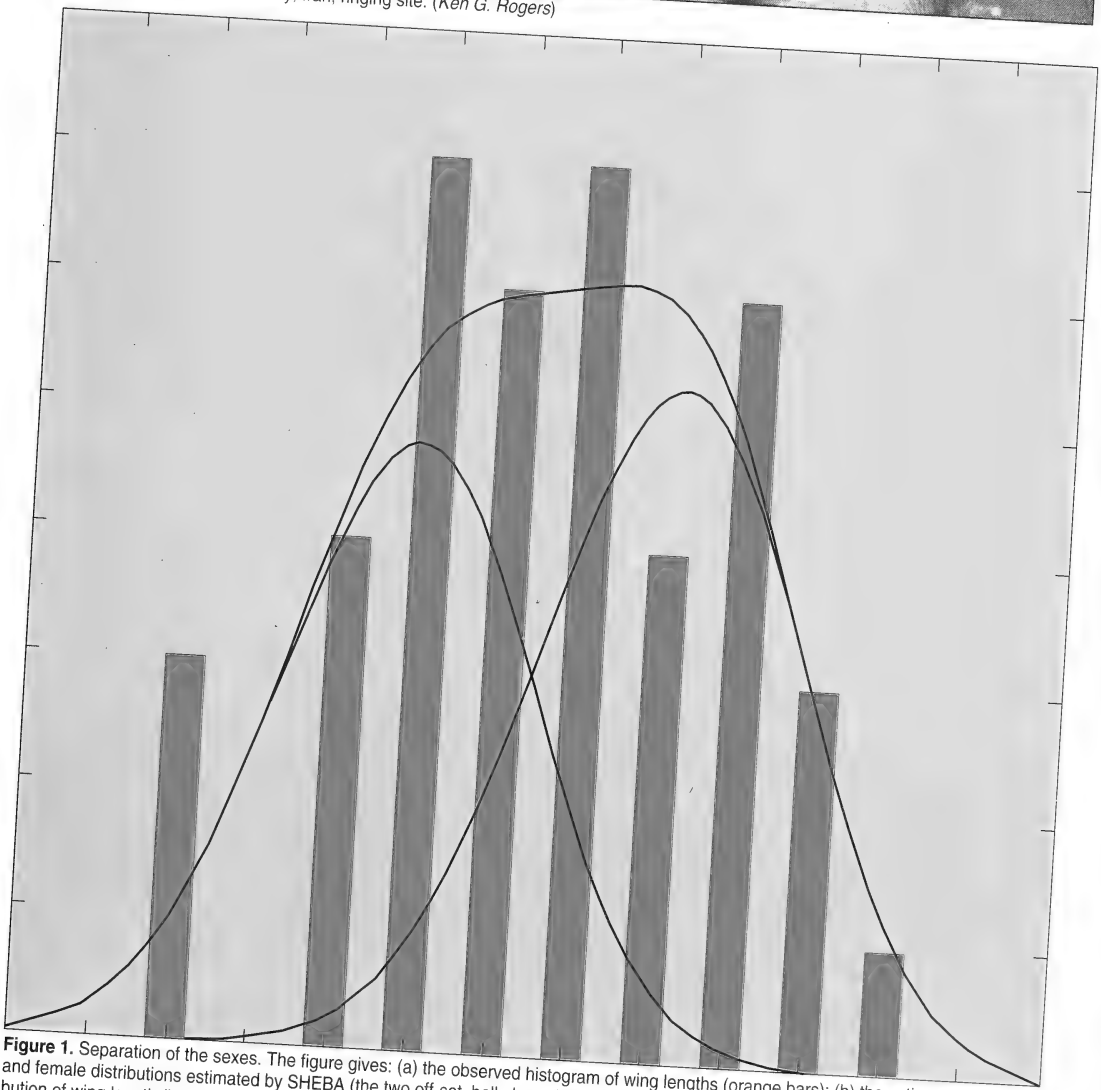

Figure 1. Separation of the sexes. The figure gives: (a) the observed histogram of wing lengths (orange bars); (b) the estimated male and female distributions estimated by SHEBA (the two off-set, bell-shaped curves); and (c) the consequential overall expected distribution of wing length (i.e. the sum of the distributions in [b]).

individuals can be sexed to a satisfactorily high level of confidence. A larger sample would increase the percentage of individuals confidently sexed to no more than c. 25% due to the extensive size overlap. The result at 50% confidence demonstrates that while more individuals can be sexed correctly by using a low level of confidence, this is at the cost of an unacceptably high number incorrectly sexed.

DISCUSSION

The absence of primary moult in all but one Radde's Accentor, the fact that most were aged as young birds (see below), the altitude of the ringing site, and the timing of their occurrence, from mid-September to early October in the Lar Valley, an area soon to be snowbound, suggest that most individuals were altitudinal migrants.

The exception is the individual retrapped in a year subsequent to that in which it was ringed and which was moulting its primaries. This must have been an adult undertaking its complete post-breeding moult (Cramp 1988). It is very unlikely therefore to have been on migration. I presume that it must have bred close to the ringing site. Hollom *et al.* (1988) report breeding in the Elburz to be 'likely but uncertain'. This individual and the large number of young would appear to remove any doubt concerning this suggestion.

The small variation in weights suggests no great accumulation of fat prior to migration. This is consistent with a short migration, e.g. to the Dasht-e-Kavir. It would also be consistent with the speculation made below that there is geographical variation in the species.

Wing lengths from the Lar Valley are clearly consistent with those given by Cramp (1988) for east Turkey and north Iran. Cramp (1988) states that no geographical variation is known for this species, but this conclusion was necessarily based on few data. Table 2 suggests the possibility of systematic size differences between southern and northern Iranian populations, with those in the south being slightly smaller. Three considerations increase this possibility:

- the estimates of this study could be underestimates of adult wing lengths due to there being so many young in the sample;
- the results for 'mainly' south Iran would be overestimates if there is a real regional size difference as some individuals in that sample were presumably from north Iran or Turkey;
- Engelmoer *et al.* (1983) suggest that wing length shrinkage of museum skins of c. 1% to 2% is possible.

Many things would doubtless be done differently if it were possible to repeat this study, particularly relating to descriptions of age/sex-related plumage features and bare parts, and taking more measurements. Sadly, this will never happen; the Lar Dam, under construction in the 1970s, has been completed and the valley, a truly beautiful place, is now under water.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Derek Scott for helpful responses to my queries and Danny Rogers for constructive comments on a draft of this paper. Without the efforts of Francis Argyle, who made ringing in the Lar Valley a reality, and the invaluable assistance in the field of Behruz Behruzi of the Iranian Department of the Environment it is unlikely that there would have been any Radde's Accentor data to report.

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Ken G. Rogers, 340, Ninks Road, St Andrews, Victoria 3761, Australia.

Appendix. Birds ringed in the Lar Valley. Retraps are excluded.

Species	scientific name	total ringed
Quail	*Coturnix coturnix*	1
Common Cuckoo	*Cuculus canorus*	1
Long-eared Owl	*Asio otus*	16
Wryneck	*Jynx torquilla*	9
Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*	3
Tawny Pipit	*Anthus campestris*	9
Tree Pipit	*Anthus trivialis*	12
Yellow Wagtail	*Motacilla flava*	1
White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*	1
Radde's Accentor	*Prunella ocularis*	96
Thrush Nightingale	*Luscinia luscinia*	9
Bluethroat	*Luscinia svecica*	3
White-throated Robin	*Irania gutturalis*	2
Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	4
Common Redstart	*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*	16
Cetti's Warbler	*Cettia cetti*	70
Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*	1
Marsh Warbler	*Acrocephalus palustris*	26
European Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*	3
Barred Warbler	*Sylvia nisoria*	4
Lesser Whitethroat	*Sylvia curruca curruca*	6
Desert Lesser Whitethroat	*Sylvia curruca minula*	3
Whitethroat	*Sylvia communis*	96
Garden Warbler	*Sylvia borin*	10
Blackcap	*Sylvia atricapilla*	4
Green Warbler	*Phylloscopus nitidus*	34
Wood Warbler	*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*	1
Chiffchaff	*Phylloscopus collybita*	161
Willow Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochilus*	34
Spotted Flycatcher	*Muscicapa striata*	9
Red-breasted Flycatcher	*Ficedula parva*	8
Semi-collared Flycatcher	*Ficedula semitorquata*	1
Golden Oriole	*Oriolus oriolus*	5
Isabelline Shrike	*Lanius isabellinus*	1
Red-backed Shrike	*Lanius collurio*	12
Lesser Grey Shrike	*Lanius minor*	1
Magpie	*Pica pica*	3
Common Rosefinch	*Carpodacus erythrinus*	33

Lesbos: an eastern Mediterranean hotspot

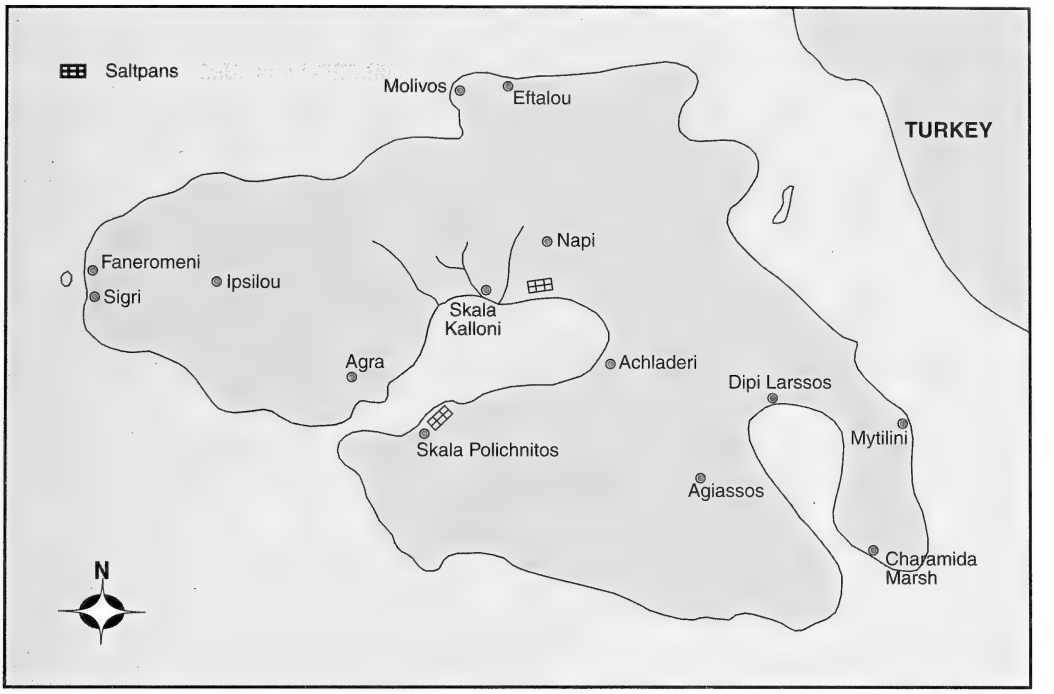
DAWN E. BALMER

Lesbos, situated in the Aegean Sea only a few kilometres from the coast of Turkey, is the third largest Greek island, after Crete and Évvia, and is approximately 70 km by 45 km at its widest points. Topography is dominated by two deeply indented gulfs: Kalloni and Yéra. Between these two lies Mount Ólymbos, at 968 metres the highest point on the island. Mytilini is the port and capital, and the island's airport is situated just to the south of the town. The island has recently become one of the most popular birdwatching destinations in Europe, due to its broad range of habitats and wonderful mix of birds.

HABITATS

One of the attractions of Lesbos to both birds and birders is its diversity of habitats. Olive *Olea europaea* plantations cover much of the lower land in the eastern and central part of the island, and with an estimated 11 million olive trees this habitat is important for both birds and the local economy. Evergreens (largely Calabrian Pine *Pinus brutia*) and oaks *Quercus* spp dominate the uplands in these areas. At the head of the Gulf of Kalloni is fertile agricultural land, dissected by seasonal rivers. The west of the island is more barren and is dominated by boulder-strewn uplands. In the vicinity of Mount Ólymbos there are Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa* woodlands and this area is particularly interesting for botanists. The sheer number of wetland habitats probably makes Lesbos more ornithologically interesting than other Greek island. There are active saltpans near Kalloni and Skala Polichnitos, and a number of rivers, ditches, pools, lakes and a recently constructed reservoir. There are also reedbeds at Dipi Larssos and Charamida.

Plate 1. Inland Lake. (*Dawn E. Balmer*)



Map of Lesbos showing the main sites mentioned in the text.

MIGRATION

The islands of the Aegean and Ionian Seas are one of several important geographical features influencing the movement of migrants over Greece, which chiefly follows a north–south axis. Migration is on a broad front as there are no true 'bottlenecks'. Many species that migrate by day at low altitude appear to follow coastlines, so the close proximity of Lesbos to the coast of Turkey makes it well positioned for observing migration. Spring passage on the island is generally more noticeable than in autumn, involving a broader range of species in usually greater numbers. This may be due to that, in spring, migrants arriving from the south have just completed a long sea, and perhaps desert, crossing and are in greater need of a stopover site at this latitude than in autumn. The weather too is much more variable in spring, and may swiftly change from calm, fine, warm weather to cloud, rain and strong northerly winds, which are conducive to 'falls' (Handrinos & Akriotis 1997).

SPRING MIGRATION

Spring migration through Lesbos can be spectacular given the correct weather conditions, and is always exciting. Passage generally commences in mid-March and continues until mid-May. However, House Martin *Delichon urbica* may arrive from mid-February and early season can hold much of interest to the visiting birder. Following the winter rains, the vegetation is lush, food is abundant and the wetland areas are particularly attractive to aquatic birds. The wetlands are alive with marsh terns *Chlidonias* spp., Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* and flocks of Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* of numerous races. Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*, European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* and Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* favour the saltpans and wet fields around Kalloni. The Inland Lake near Kalloni is a superb place to observe Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, and Little *Porzana parva* and Spotted Crakes *P. porzana* at close quarters. The fertile land around Sigri can be particularly productive and often holds shrikes *Lanius* spp., flycatchers *Ficedula* spp., Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* and Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*. Increased coverage at this season has produced a flurry of records of unusual birds, which in spring 2000 included White-tailed Plover *Chettusia leucura*, Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida* and Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*.

Plates 2–4. Greater Flamingos (top), Dipi Larssos, largest reedbed (middle), Napi Valley, an Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum* site (bottom). (*Dawn E. Balmer*)

Plates 5–7. Ipsilou (top), North coast towards Molyvos (middle), Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* (bottom). (*Dawn E. Balmer*)

BREEDING SPECIES

Two of the most sought-after species on Lesbos, Krüper's Nuthatch *Sitta krueperi* and Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza cineracea* breed. The former is found primarily in upland conifer forests in the south-east of the island, and is best searched for around Agiassos and on lower land adjacent to the army camp at Achladeri. This is also a good area to find Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus tephronotus*, Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus* and Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*. The boulder-strewn uplands in the west of the island are the stronghold of Cinereous Bunting, which can also be found as far east as the higher ground inland of Kalloni. The areas around Ipsilou, and between Agra and Mesotopos, are particularly good for this species; also look here for Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*, Rock Nuthatch *Sitta neumayer* and Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*.

Lesbos is also unusual in being the only Greek island to hold resident Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*, Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* and Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*. Middle Spotted Woodpecker is widespread and relatively common, particularly in the olive groves, but the other two species are both scarce and localised, and good fortune is required to see them!

In Greece, Rüppell's Warbler *Sylvia rueppelli* reaches the southernmost limit of its Western Palearctic breeding range and it is a localised breeder on Lesbos, being most commonly found around Petra and Molivos. Other important breeding species include Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*, Olivaceous *Hippolais pallida*, Olive-tree *H. olivetorum* and Subalpine Warblers *Sylvia cantillans*, Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*, and Cretzschmar's *Emberiza caesia* and Black-headed Buntings *E. melanocephala*. All these, with the exception of Olive-tree Warbler, are easily found from late April onwards. The latter is localised and favours areas with mixed oaks and olives. The most reliable place to find the species is the Napi Valley, north-east of Agia Paraskevi, which is also an excellent area to observe raptor passage, with large numbers of Red-footed Falcon passing in spring, along with the occasional Lanner *Falco biarmicus* and Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*.

Eleonora's Falcon *Falco eleonorae* is thought to breed on offshore islands, but this is still to be confirmed. However, the species can regularly be seen from mid-April to mid-October throughout the island. Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii* has recently been confirmed to breed on the rocky islets off the north coast (Filios Akriotis pers. comm.), and is regularly observed off Eftalou. Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* is a localised breeder: Derbyshire, Faneromeni and the Kalloni saltpans are reliable locations. More unusual are probable breeding records of White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis* and Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*.

AUTUMN MIGRATION

Most migrants move between early/mid-August and late October/early November, but some waders have commenced autumn migration before mid-July. The weather at this time of year is generally warm and sunny, with winds from a more or less constant northerly direction, assisting southbound migration.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* and Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* are far more numerous in autumn than in spring, and are common during this period. The landscape is parched and birds are generally much more difficult to find than in the spring. The saltpans at Kalloni and Skala Polichnitos hold a wide range of waders, albeit in smaller numbers than spring. Yellow Wagtail is particularly abundant on autumn migration and several hundred roost in the reedbeds at Dipi Larssos and Charamida Marsh. Interesting species can be found anywhere, often in the most unexpected places: Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus* near Megalochori, Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* at Charamida Marsh and Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* off Mytilini. Ringing studies have demonstrated that some species occur more regularly than previously considered, for example Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* and Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* (pers. obs.).

WINTER VISITORS

Olive trees laden with unpicked olives are an important habitat for wintering thrushes, particularly Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, Blackbird *T. merula* and Robin *Erithacus rubecula*. Small numbers of Redwing *Turdus*

Plate 8. Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*. (*Dawn E. Balmer*)

iliacus winter and Fieldfare *T. pilaris* is scarcer at this season. The olives also attract wintering Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla*. Wetland habitats are also important at this time of year: over 500 Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* winter on the saltpans at Kalloni and Skala Polichnitos, and both Hen *Circus cyaneus* and Marsh Harriers *C. aeruginosus* can be found quartering the reedbed at Dipi Larssos. Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* is a scarce but regular winter visitor. Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* is relatively common in winter (and almost certainly breeds), while Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* and Siskin *Carduelis spinus* are irregular visitors. Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* and the more abundant Reed Bunting *E. schoeniclus* can also be found at this time of year. Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* is regular and widespread in winter, being particularly common around Kalloni. The winter months have also produced such gems as Black Lark *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis* and Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus* (Brooks 1998).

Lesbos is a wonderful place to visit at any time of year. No introduction to the birding opportunities available would be complete without mentioning the stunning displays of wild flowers in the spring, the interesting architecture of Mytilini and beyond, and the friendly nature of the locals. The status of many species has been clarified by the increase in observer coverage, but little is known about those species that occur in the autumn and winter. The number of breeding pairs of Krüper's Nuthatch and Cinereous Bunting are unknown, as large areas of the island are yet to be visited by birders, while the occurrence of some species still presents a complete mystery: does any woodpecker species other than Middle Spotted Woodpecker breed? Syrian *Dendrocopus syriacus*, Great Spotted *D. major* and White-backed Woodpecker *D. leucotos* have all been recorded in the last ten years. There is still much to be discovered and many bird-filled days to be enjoyed, and even after eight visits I will certainly be going back for more!

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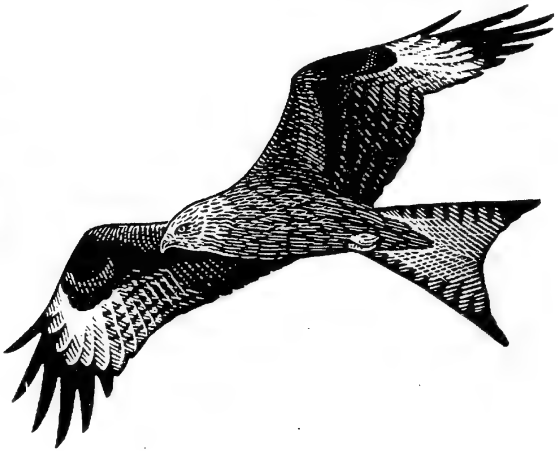

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PHOTO spot

The pelicans of the Ile River Delta, Kazakhstan

The Ile River rises in western China and enters Kazakhstan before draining north-west into Asia's fourth largest lake, Lake Balkash, where it forms an 800,000 ha-delta. The area consists of an extensive network of channels, bordered by dense riparian scrub, lakes, reedbeds and desert with stands of *Populus diversifolia* forest—endemic to Central Asia—supporting a specialised avifauna including Eastern Stock Dove *Columba eversmanni*, White-winged Woodpecker *Dendrocopus leucopterus*, Turkestan Tit *Parus bokharensis*, and Saxaul Sparrow *Passer ammodendri* in adjacent scrub. The wetland covers c. 168,000 ha and is the largest in Kazakhstan. It holds colonies of breeding Dalmatian *Pelecanus crispus* and White Pelicans *P. onocrotalus*, Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, many herons and terns, breeding Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*, Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, and many waders. The formerly relatively common White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* appears to have declined to just a few pairs.

The most obvious birds in the open delta during summer are the pelicans, with huge flocks of both species constantly moving between feeding sites and their colonies. However, both are declining and the decrease appears to have accelerated in recent years. In 1984–85, 650–820 pairs of Dalmatian Pelican bred in five colonies. By 1998, just three colonies remained, with 98 pairs at two which together held up to 550 pairs in 1986–89. In 1984 up to 2500 pairs of White Pelican were present at one of these, making it the largest known pelican colony in Eurasia, but this species was not present in 1998. It is possible that undiscovered colonies exist in the delta, but in recent years the species has nested on islands in Lake Balkash and a new colony has been found at Sorbulak reservoir, where c. 25 pairs nest. Thus the species may now only be using the delta for feeding, as suggested by the presence of over 1000 White Pelican at the site in 1998.

Burning is probably the major negative factor affecting pelicans, other colonial nesting wetland species and White-tailed Eagle. Local hunters, fishermen and farmers burn the reeds regularly (from every 3–4 years to annually or even more frequently) to destroy old growth and provide areas for grazing, hunting of Muskrat *Ondatra zibetica* and fishing access. Burning is uncontrolled and occurs throughout the delta even in the wetter parts. Even in June it is undertaken on a near-daily basis. Most burning takes place following winter and before renewed growth, which coincides with the nesting or pre-nesting season of most colonial bird species. Furthermore, at the delta edges burning destroys mature trees where White-tailed Eagles nest and on which the specialised passerine avifauna of the area depends.

Disturbance would be greatly reduced if locals such as graziers adjusted their practices to avoid burning during the breeding season. Other negative factors affecting pelicans are now less significant. There is no doubt that individual pelicans are occasionally shot and direct disturbance to the colonies by fishermen and hunters does occur, but illegal hunting and deliberate disturbance or vandalism do not appear to be major problems. Despite the harsh living conditions endured by local fishermen, pelicans are not seen as competing with their livelihood: in 1998, at least, the nests of those pelicans breeding in the delta all contained well-grown young and were undisturbed despite many people knowing their whereabouts.

Simon Busuttil, RSPB Dungeness Reserve, Boulderwall Farm, Dungeness, Romney Marsh, Kent, U. K.

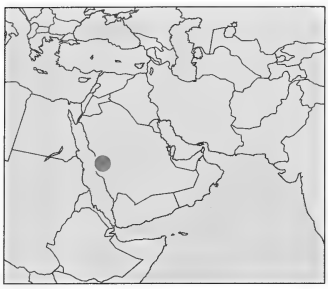
 The inclusion of colour in this Photospot has been subsidised by **Julian Francis.**

Plates 1–3. White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, Ile River Delta, Kazakhstan (top left). Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Ile River Delta, Kazakhstan (top right). Upper Ile River Delta, Kazakhstan (bottom). (*Steve Rowland*)

Plates 4–6. Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* colony, Lake Alakol, Ile River Delta, Kazakhstan (top). Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* chicks, Ile River Delta, Kazakhstan (bottom left). White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* chicks in nest, Ile River Delta, Kazakhstan (bottom right). (*Steve Rowland*)

The autumn raptor flyway in western Arabia north of the Taif Escarpment

BRIAN S. MEADOWS



Autumn raptor passage through the western Arabian Peninsula, in the Hejaz north of Taif, has not previously been documented. Annual observations over a ten-year period, at the coastal city of Yanbu al-Sinaiyah, demonstrated that five species of soaring raptors annually use this route. The most abundant was Common (Steppe) Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, of which maximum numbers passed in late September and early October, with Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* peaking one month later. Maximum numbers of Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* occurred in September, while Black Kite *Milvus migrans* exhibited two peaks (in September and November). Although observed annually, relatively few Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* were seen. Supplementary counts inland suggest that most Steppe Buzzard do not use a broad front across the Arabian peninsula en route for Africa, as believed to be the case for the majority of Steppe Eagle, but follow a more concentrated route that takes them over lava fields of north Arabia and upland wadi corridors, before reaching the northern Hejaz–Asir Mountains. Two sites that could be used for systematic counts in the future, in the piedmont zone of the hinterland near Yanbu, are indicated.

INTRODUCTION

THE CONCENTRATED AUTUMN PASSAGE of raptors over the Hejaz and Asir Mountains, east of the Red Sea, culminating at the short sea-crossing into Africa via the Bab el-Mandeb is a relatively recent discovery (Porter & Christensen 1987, Welch & Welch 1988). I was resident for ten autumns in the central Hejaz, during 1984 to 1993 inclusive, and lived throughout this period at the coastal city of Yanbu al-Sinaiyah (23°56′N 38°14′E).

During my first autumn, field observations at my coastal residence on the Tihama, at Yanbu but, more significantly, in the hinterland, indicated that a concentrated movement of raptors in a general north-northwest–south-southeast direction parallel to the Red Sea coast existed (Fig. 1). The movement was visible from the coast to at least 80 km inland, with a narrow concentrated flyway over the black basaltic lava fields of the piedmont zone in the foothills of Jebels Radwa and Figrah. I was, unfortunately, only able to visit the hinterland occasionally at weekends, but I did maintain a daily log of raptor migration over Yanbu al-Sinaiyah and, as a result, obtained data on raptor species regularly using the flyway, an indication of their relative numbers and timing of peak abundance.

As Yanbu al-Sinaiyah is close to the Red Sea and, therefore, influenced by sea breezes, especially after midday, it was a far from optimal location in respect of attempting to estimate total numbers using the flyway. The numbers of raptors I observed clearly represented only a tiny fraction of the total autumn movement. However, given the complete dearth of raptor migration data from the region bounded to the north by the Gulf of Aqaba and, in the south, by the Hejaz–Asir Escarpment near Taif (Welch & Welch 1992), my observations are still worthy of publication. This paper also seeks to draw attention to gaps in our knowledge of raptor migration routes in north-west Saudi Arabia and to stimulate future field observations at key sites, as access to the area will probably be facilitated by recent government policy designed to promote ecotourism in Saudi Arabia (Seddon in press).

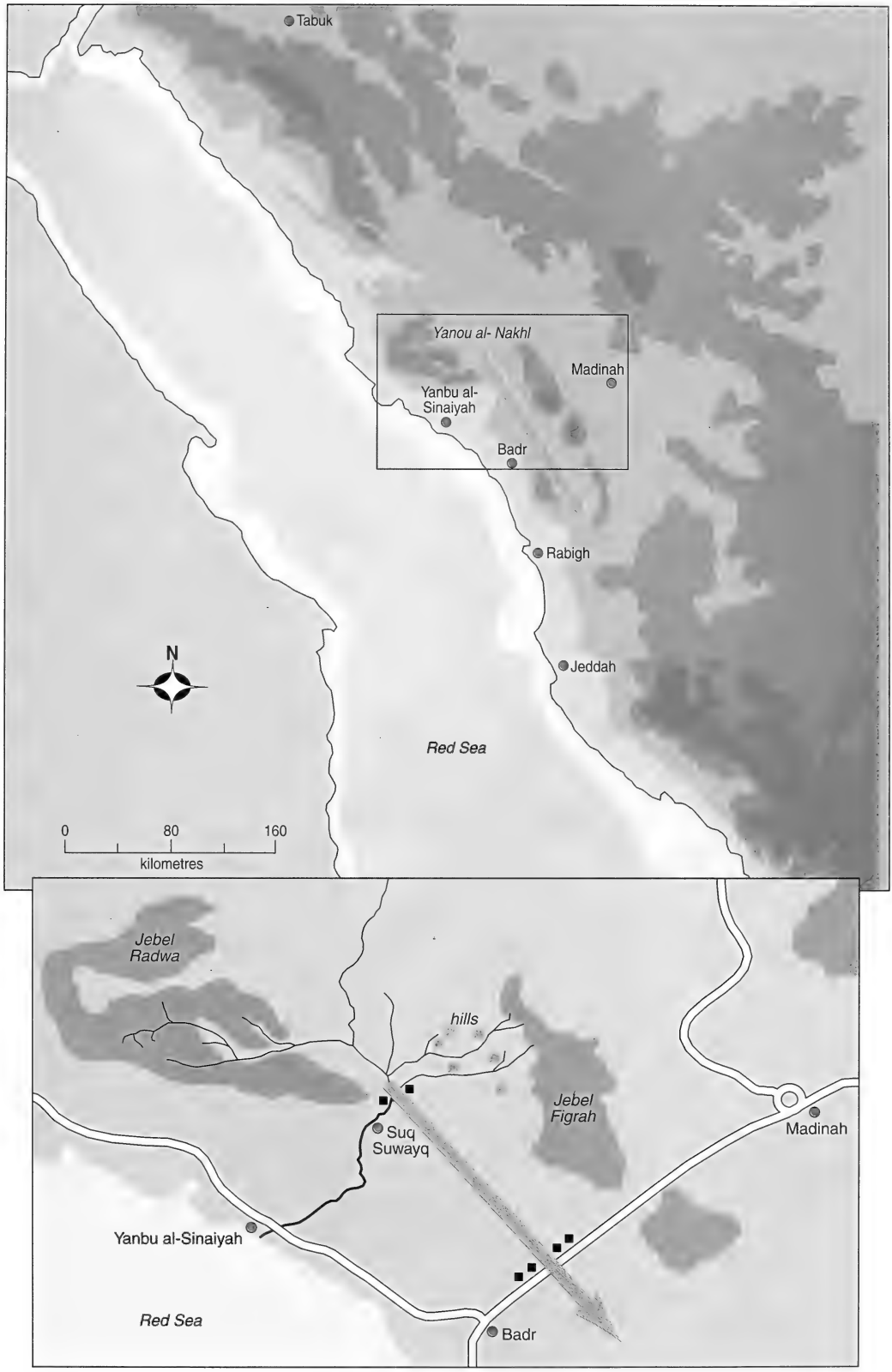
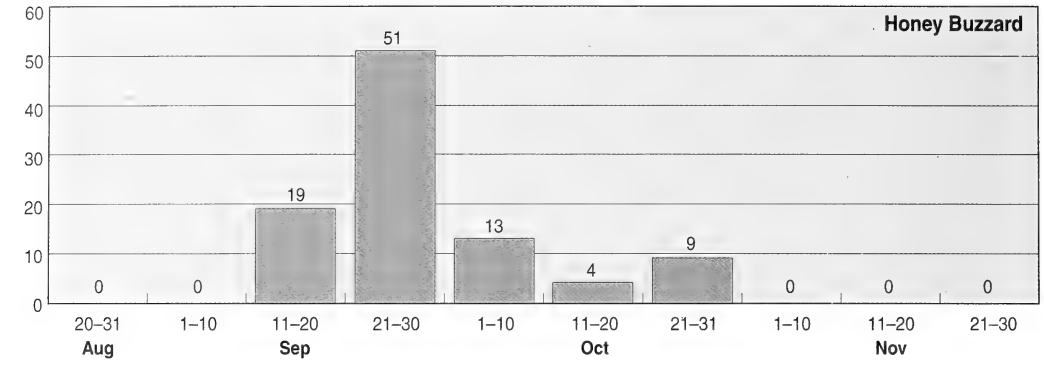
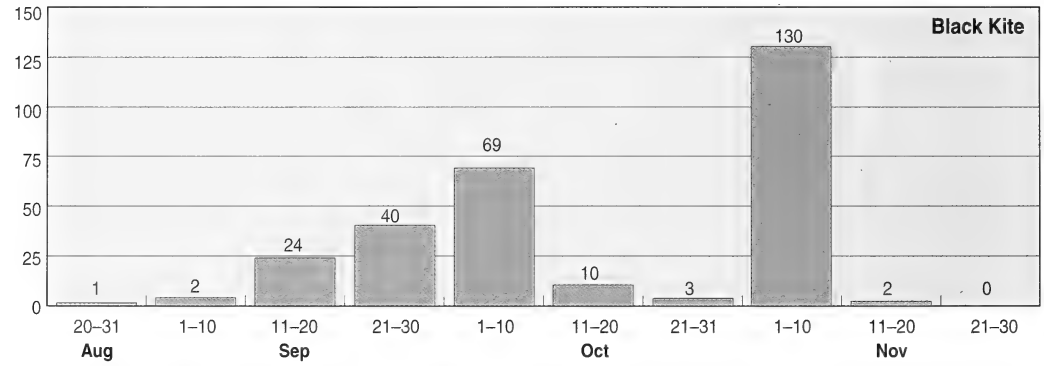
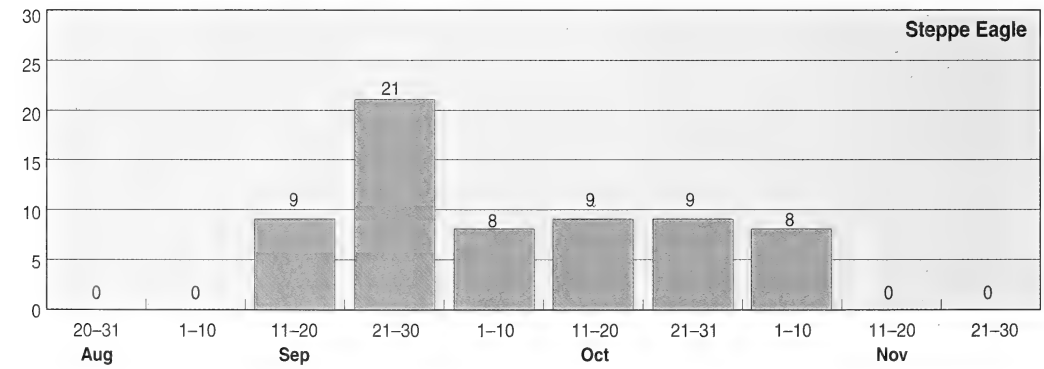
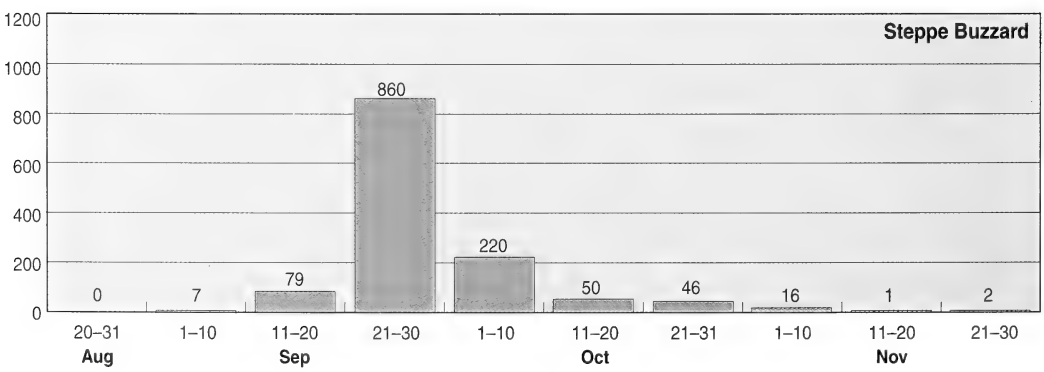


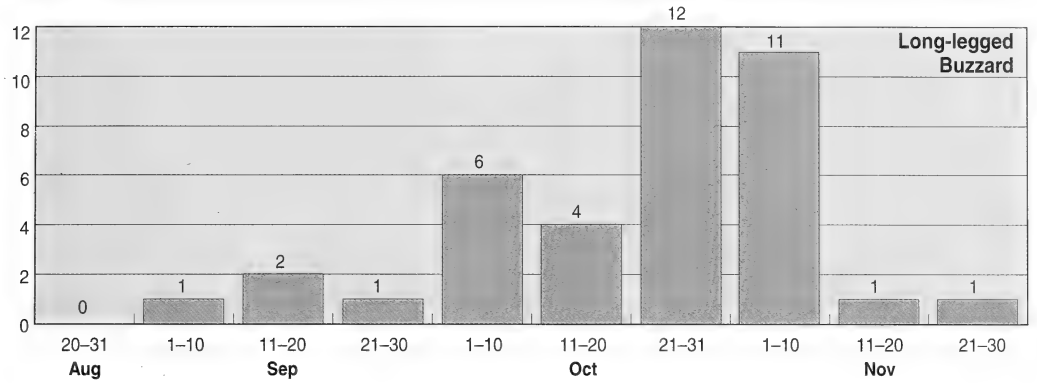
Figure 1. Map showing concentrated raptor flyway in central Hejaz, with possible future survey transects (see text) indicated.


Honey Buzzard
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
0
0
19
51
13
4
9
0
0
0
20–31
1–10
11–20
21–30
1–10
11–20
21–31
1–10
11–20
21–30
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov


Black Kite
150
125
100
75
50
25
0
1
2
24
40
69
10
3
130
2
0
20–31
1–10
11–20
21–30
1–10
11–20
21–31
1–10
11–20
21–30
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov


Steppe Eagle
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
0
0
9
21
8
9
9
8
0
0
20–31
1–10
11–20
21–30
1–10
11–20
21–31
1–10
11–20
21–30
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov


Steppe Buzzard
1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0
0
7
79
860
220
50
46
16
1
2
20–31
1–10
11–20
21–30
1–10
11–20
21–31
1–10
11–20
21–30
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov



RESULTS

Ten species of migrating raptors, excluding harriers *Circus* spp., falcons *Falco* spp. and Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, were positively identified at Yanbu al-Sinaiyah. At least five, namely Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Common (Steppe) Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* and Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*, were annual. Data for these species is plotted in the histograms using approximate ten-day periods. The histograms cover each autumn migration period (i.e. from the last week of August until late November) of my residence. Periods when I was absent from Yanbu for a significant period during autumn are listed in Appendix 1.

In addition to the above five species, Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Levant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter brevipes*, Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* and Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* were confirmed to use the flyway, at least in some years. Single Booted Eagles were seen passing on four occasions in 1985, 1988 and 1990 (all between mid-September and first week of October). Six Egyptian Vulture records consisted of two in September, one in October and three during the first week of November, with a maximum of three individuals together. Short-toed Eagle was seen only once—a single on 29 September 1989. Spotted Eagle was positively identified twice (1 October 1993 and 14 October 1989), with both seen at rest.

Levant Sparrowhawk was observed at Yanbu al-Sinaiyah in September 1987 (one on 31st) and in October 1988 (16 on 12th, one on 13th and two on 14th). None were observed over the city in 1989, but a dense flock comprising 70 was seen in the hinterland, at Yanbu al-Nakl, on 29 September 1990. Subsequently I observed one at Yanbu al-Sinaiyah, on 24 September 1992. These are the only records for the central Hejaz. Identification was based on Porter *et al.* (1974).

It is also probable that, in some years, a few Lesser Spotted Eagles *Aquila pomarina* use the Hejaz route in autumn. Twice, in 1984–1993, I observed eagles in flight that conformed to identification criteria outlined in Pearson & Meadows (1979), while recently I received a convincing description from Gary Bletsch of one he watched on the ground at Yanbu, on 28 October 1999 (see Appendix 2).

DISCUSSION

Cramp & Simmons (1980) considered it unlikely that Honey Buzzard passage occurred east of the Red Sea. However, this is clearly incorrect, albeit numbers are relatively small: at Yanbu the majority pass during September. Incidentally, among all raptors, this species was the most frequent to be seen in active flight (rather than soaring) along the shoreline and on one occasion (28 September 1986 at 10.00 hours) I observed one flying out to sea, as most harriers do, indicating that some may attempt to directly

cross the Red Sea. Honey Buzzards are capable of sustained flight over large waterbodies and are less restricted to narrow sea crossings than other soaring raptors. Moreau (1972) makes reference to small numbers observed crossing the Red Sea.

Black Kite was the only soaring raptor species that I observed in August. The species is known to depart some of its breeding areas early and, in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, the initial vanguard can be observed as early as mid-July (pers. obs.). My data indicates two distinct peaks—the first coinciding with the main period of Steppe Buzzard passage, which presumably consists principally of individuals that cross the Red Sea into Africa. The second peak, in November, probably involves those wintering further south within the Arabian Peninsula; it is, for example, an abundant winter visitor around Jeddah.

The most abundant raptor was Steppe Buzzard, with peak movement occurring between late September and early October. Steppe Buzzard has been known to be abundant on autumn passage in the eastern Pontics, Turkey, since the mid-1970s (Beaman & Porter 1977), but had remained virtually undetected further south until the discovery of passage through the Hejaz–Asir Mountains and at the Bab el-Mandeb crossing during the 1980s (Welch & Welch 1988). Welch & Welch (1992) demonstrated that significant numbers pass over the Hejaz at c. 21°N. My observations indicate that the flyway is concentrated as far north as Yanbu: numerous *ad hoc* autumn visits to the hinterland revealed continuous, concentrated raptor movement over the piedmont zone, which is dominated by black basaltic lava fields at the foot of larger mountains (two sites are marked in Fig. 1). Unlike south of Mecca, all mountains above 2000 metres (such as Jebels Figrah and Radwa) in the central Hejaz are isolated and no passage was observed above 2000 metres. At the southern site along the Badr–Madina highway, I witnessed, on 7 October 1988 (at 09.00–13.00 hours), a movement of Steppe Buzzards approaching 400 per hour. Assuming that most individuals move over a seven-hour period, numbers per day would approach the same order of magnitude as recorded by Welch & Welch (1992) at Taif in 1991, when on three occasions they had daily counts of over 3000. The other site marked on Fig. 1 where I observed concentrated passage each autumn was at the gorge formed by Wadi Farah, just above Suk Suwayq, in the Yanbu al-Nakl valley immediately below Jebel Radwa; here an opportunist count on 28 September 1990 produced 335 birds per hour. Both sites appear ideal for systematic counting, with the former probably superior, as a wider field of view is available. Incidentally, there is some circumstantial evidence that this narrow flightpath extends as far north as Tabuk: on 26–30 September 1985, Greg Scott observed a continuous movement of 'buzzards' while following the abandoned Hejaz railway between Madain Salah and Tabuk. Though not an ornithologist he accompanied me on several occasions on raptor watches at Yanbu. George Gregory (pers. comm.) reports that relatively few Steppe Buzzards are currently observed during autumn in Kuwait (*contra* Shirihai *et al.* 2000). Additionally, I have never observed significant passage over the north-east deserts of Saudi Arabia during short visits in September–November (in 1994–1996 and 2000). Rather than moving diagonally on a broad front across the Arabian Peninsula, I speculate that, in order to avoid extensive sand deserts (e.g. the Nafud), most may pass over the Syrian Desert lava fields, after leaving the Caucasus/northern Zagros Mountains. Low-altitude, pre-noon thermals may form more readily over the Syrian Desert, and the passage would also be well positioned for the flight over the western uplands of Saudi Arabia.

Long-legged Buzzard numbers were small and peaked later than the main passage of Steppe Buzzard. In Africa the species rarely reaches the equator (Britton 1980).

The peak migration period for Steppe Eagle is considered to be mid to late October (Welch & Welch 1992). Although recorded annually, relatively few were observed at Yanbu; passage ranged from mid-September to early November with no significant peak. This extended passage period matches my observations from the Dibdibah Plain, in north-east Arabia, where the species passes annually from mid-September onwards. Steppe Eagle also occurs in some concentrations over Kuwait. The few seen at Yanbu (including hinterland observations, such as from the Badr–Madina highway) indicate that, having entered Arabia around the head of the Gulf, most cross the Arabian Peninsula on a north-east–south-west axis and presumably at a considerable height, to reach the Hejaz–Asir Mountains south of Taif, as suggested by Welch & Welch (1992).

Finally an area worthy of mention, situated between Taif and the Tropic of Cancer, is the freshwater springs at Rabigh, described in Evans (1994). These are utilised by all five species of raptor where they can be seen at close range as they pause to drink, while adjacent cliffs are used for roosting. However, the surrounding area is flat, essentially dominated by *Acacia* scrub, and offers few, if any, vantage points for monitoring migration quantitatively.

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Brian S. Meadows, P. O. Box 10476, Jubail 31961, Saudi Arabia.
(Permanent address: 9 Old Hall Lane, Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex C014 8LE, U. K.)

Appendix 1. Dates absent from Yanbu al-Sinaiyah.

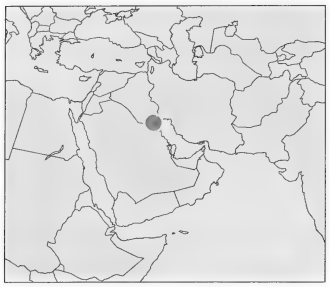
1984:	31 August–2 September
1985:	16 August–9 September
1986:	11 August–9 September
1987:	19 August–14 September
1988:	15 August–8 September
1989:	3 August–31 August
1990:	16 August–31 August
1991:	24 September–27 September
1992:	12 August–18 September
1993:	resident throughout

Appendix 2. Description of Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* at Yanbu al-Sinaiyah.

Aquila sp., very small, drinking at a puddle at 10 metres range from car. Small bill, yellow gape. Not much larger than a *Buteo* drinking alongside. Upperwing-coverts were pale dusty with slightly darker and duller areas on fore part of each feather. 'Trousers' not very bushy. Bird had wet tarsi, so feathers there barely visible. Mostly dull medium brown, definitely not blackish. Flight feathers dark. Tail with narrow whitish terminal band. No other obvious markings. Some paler feathers on uppertail-coverts. Dominant over Steppe Buzzards *Buteo buteo vulpinus* that came to drink.

Reduction of bird shooting in Kuwait

GEORGE GREGORY, PETER ROBERTSON AND BARRY THOMAS



In the aftermath of Operation Desert Storm shooting and other activities harmful to birds resumed in Kuwait. Various organisations have recently taken steps to reduce the amount of shooting and the effectiveness of this is demonstrated by data on bird shooting before these measures were introduced.

ALMOST ALL OF THE EFFECTS of oil and oil-fire pollution, at the end of Operation Desert Storm, on bird populations in Kuwait appear to be long passed. The principal factors now limiting many bird species in Kuwait are shooting, overgrazing, disturbance and coastline chalet building. More positively, the recent security fencing of the oilfields has, albeit unintentionally, created several very large areas where wildlife is effectively totally protected. The fencing around the national park (east of Mutla') and nature reserves at Doha and Jahra Pool have recently been improved to exclude shooters, and grazing and camping have almost ceased in the national park. This has caused shooting of birds in these areas to be reduced to zero, and full credit for this development is due to the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) and the Environment Public Authority (EPA). Much of the rest of Kuwait is a 'free-fire zone' for birds, mammals and reptiles.

Some birds are obviously shot for food, particularly pigeons and doves, larks and *Sylvia* warblers (especially Barred Warblers *S. nisoria* in spring, when very heavily laden with fat). Many are roasted and eaten, once the head, wings and feathers have been removed. For instance, only the head of a shot Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza cineracea* was found. Food value of roasted birds is obviously significantly less than transport and shooting costs, so no economic justification is involved. The remains of several other species, e.g. Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*, pratincoles *Glareola* spp. and bee-eaters *Merops* spp., typically consist solely of the wings or head, so are presumably also taken as food, not necessarily just for humans, but possibly also for domestic pets.

Others are shot for 'sport' and their bodies left 'intact' on the ground. Some species do not flee from gunshots. For example, we have recently seen entire migratory flocks of 30+ bee-eaters shot one by one, within a few minutes, as they circled around trees overhead. Many raptors are also attracted to the trees and present easy targets. Some injured individuals are captured and kept in captivity, e.g. large raptors.

In order to obtain quantitative evidence concerning bird shooting in Kuwait, we undertook a year-long study at Tulha, c. 29°35'N 47°47'E, an isolated group of c. 50 *Prosopis*, *Zizyphus* and *Acacia* trees, approximately 10 km inland of Kuwait Bay and largely surrounded by open sand and over-grazed semi-desert. This study was undertaken prior to the recent improvement in fencing around the national park, in which Tulha is situated, and therefore indicates how important the recent changes have been. On collection dates we bagged all 'intact' bodies and loose wings and heads of birds at the site. These were identified, counted and disposed of elsewhere in order to prevent double counting. The results are shown in Table 1.

Undercounting is probable, due to (1) removal of some 'intact' shot birds by hunters and (2) remains being blown away, by occasional strong winds, from the site. Shooting pressure by hunters at Tulha was not quantified, but was obviously very high, with many thousands of spent cartridges on the ground. Very few live birds, mostly small warblers, were seen at the site.

There is very low ornithological coverage in Kuwait, and the data obtained in this study were also extremely valuable as evidence of migration dates and numbers. At this small site the numbers of shot Caspian Plover, Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*, European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters *M. persicus* were surprisingly high. All raptors at Tulha are migrants and the numbers shot give cause for concern, as does the shooting of Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*.

Unsurprisingly, a high proportion of rare birds in Kuwait in recent years has been found dead. During this study the following species found had been properly documented fewer than ten times previously in the country: Egyptian Nightjar *Caprimulgus aegypticus*, Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, Alpine Swift *Apus melba*, Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*, Cinereous Bunting and Yellow-throated Sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis*. Previously, at Tulha, we have found Red-wattled Plover *Hoplopterus indicus*, Shikra *Accipiter badius* and Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*. Various other rarities have been found as corpses at other shooting sites.

Fig. 1 presents the totals of dead birds on each collection date throughout the year. Little shooting occurs between June and early September, due to the intense heat, so few are likely to have been missed. The total of 1417 individuals therefore represents a minimum count at one shooting site in Kuwait in a year. Fig. 1 clearly shows the pattern of bird migration at isolated groups of trees in Kuwait in spring (sudden large 'falls') and autumn (lower and less concentrated numbers).

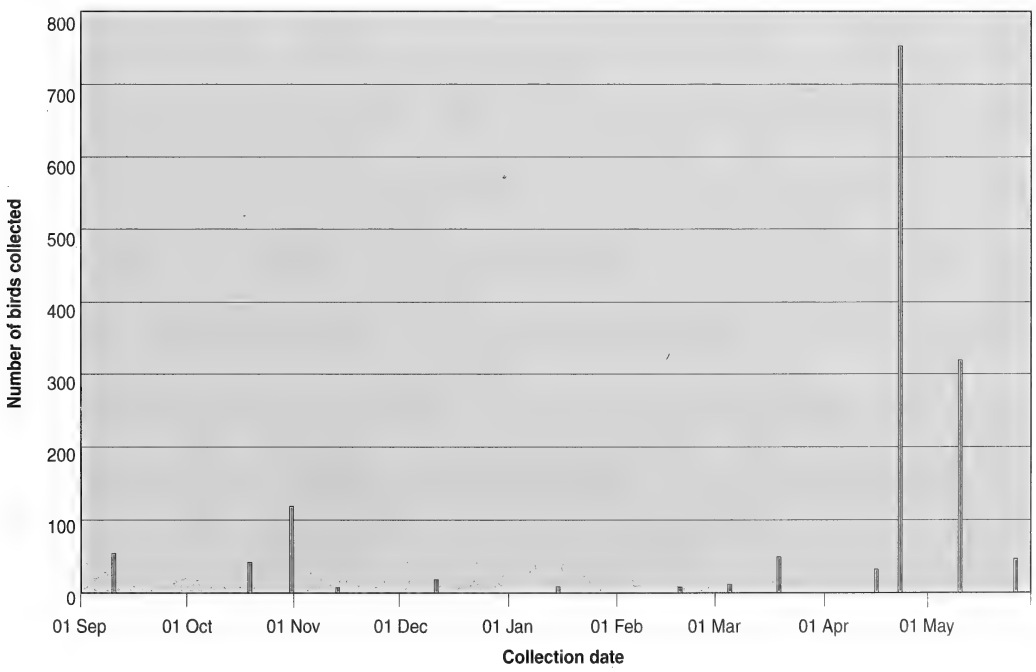


Figure 1. Numbers of dead birds recovered at Tulha during September 1998 to May 1999.

Table 1. Numbers of birds found shot at Tulha, Kuwait, in 1998–1999.

Species	Collection date 1998–1999													Total
	10/9	19/10	31/10	13/11	11/12	15/01	19/02	05/03	19/03	16/04	23/04	10/05	26/05	
Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*											2	1		3
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*	2													2
Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*								1						1
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*		1			1					1	1		1	5
Montagu's Harrier *C. pygargus*	2	4									4	2		12
Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*		5	1	1			1			1	4	5	1	19
Goshawk *A. gentilis*		1												1
Buzzard *Buteo buteo*		4			1	1		1			4			11
Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*			1											1
Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*								2						2
Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*												1		1
Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*										1	17	9	4	31
Kestrel *F. tinnunculus*								1		1	9	2		13
Quail *Coturnix coturnix*	2	1				1					3	1		8
Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*		1										1		2
Corncrake *Crex crex*											1	1		2
Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*											1			1
Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*										2	14	5	1	22
Black-winged Pratincole *G. nordmanni*											6			6
Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*	1										10	1		12
Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*											1			1
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*											1			1
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*											2	1		3
Rock Dove *Columba livia*								1	1		2			4
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*		1												1
Turtle Dove *S. turtur*	1										23	1		25
Laughing Dove *S. senegalensis*		1	1									2		4
Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*											1			1
Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*	1										4	2	1	8
Barn Owl *Tyto alba*										1	1			2
European Scops Owl *Otus scops*		4	2				1				4	2	1	14
European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*												3		3
Egyptian Nightjar *C. aegyptius*	1													1
Common Swift *Apus apus*			1								11	4		16
Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*								1		1	1			3
Alpine Swift *A. melba*										2				2
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*	4	4	80		1				24	1	77	74	8	273

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*	3	2	3					5	123	28	5	169
European Roller *Coracias garrulus*	4	2	1		1			1	9	3		21
Hoopoe *Upupa epops*	3	2	1	1			5	1	9	2	1	25
Wryneck *Jynx torquila*									1			1
Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*			8							1		9
Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*									4			4
Lesser Short-toed Lark *C. rufescens*									2			2
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*	1		3				2	2	9	3	1	21
Skylark *Alauda arvensis*				1					1			2
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*									16	11	1	28
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*		1	2			1	2	3	211	53	10	283
Red-rumped Swallow *H. daurica*									2			2
House Martin *Delichon urbica*									6	2		8
Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*								1				1
Tree Pipit *A. trivialis*									3			3
Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus*									2			2
Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*								1	15	3		19
White Wagtail *M. alba*						1			2			3
Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*									3			3
Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*	1									1		2
Rufous Bush Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*	1								2	1		4
White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis*									2	3		5
Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*									5	5	1	11
Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*									1			1
Stonechat *S. torquata*									1			1
Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*	3		6		7		5					21
Northern Wheatear *O. oenanthe*	2		1				1		1	1		6
Pied Wheatear *O. pleschanka*			1						3			4
Desert Wheatear *O. deserti*					4		1					5
Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*										1		1
Blue Rock Thrush *M. solitarius*							1					1
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*							1					1
European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*	1									1		2
Marsh Warbler *A. palustris*										1		1
Clamorous Reed Warbler *A. stentoreus*					1				1			2
Great Reed Warbler *A. arundinaceus*	1								8	2		11
Basra Reed Warbler *A. griseldis*	1								1			2
Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*									2			2
Booted Warbler *H. caligata*										1		1
Upcher's Warbler *H. languida*	1								5			6
Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis*	1			1					2			4

Barred Warbler *S. nisoria*	3		1										13
Lesser Whitethroat *S. curruca*	2						1		7	8	1		19
Whitethroat *S. communis*	2								6	16			24
Garden Warbler *S. borin*	1								3	1			5
Blackcap *S. atricapilla*									5	1			6
Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*					1		1		3				5
Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*	1		1						13	2			17
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*	1									4	1		6
Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*							1		1				2
Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*	1	1							1	4			7
Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*		1							12	6			19
Red-backed Shrike *L. collurio*	1	1							1	10	2		15
Lesser Grey Shrike *L. minor*			1							3			4
Great Grey Shrike *L. excubitor*	1								3				4
Steppe Grey Shrike *L. (e.) pallidirostris*			1										1
Woodchat Shrike *L. senator*	1								7	3	2		13
Masked Shrike *L. nubicus*	1							1	5				7
Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*									17	4			21
Yellow-throated Sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis*										2			2
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*									1				1
Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza cineracea*									1				1
Unidentified	1		1				1		4	1			8
Total	**53**	**37**	**117**	**3**	**16**	**3**	**5**	**7**	**47**	**26**	**746**	**315**	**42**	**1417**

The level of shooting at Tulha was not unique; it was repeated at Sobaliya, Jahra Camping Area, Jahra East Outfall, and many other sites in the country. However, there now appears to be a gradual decrease in shooting of birds in Kuwait due to measures taken by relevant authorities to exclude hunters from important ornithological sites, by publicity in the media and educational programmes. The Bird Monitoring and Protection Society has recently been formed to undertake further improvements in bird protection in the country.

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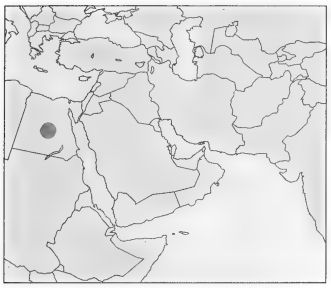
George Gregory, Peter Robertson and Barry Thomas, c/o K. E. S., P. O. Box 8640, Salmiya 22057, Kuwait.

The occurrence of Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* in Egypt

ANDREW GRIEVE, MINDY BAHA EL DIN AND SHERIF M. BAHA EL DIN



We present the first documented occurrences of Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* in Egypt, at Gebel Elba in April 1997 and November 2000. Goodman & Meininger (1989) did not include Long-billed Pipit on the Egyptian list, although the species appears to be breeding, at least locally, in the extreme south-east of the country. The subspecies concerned is presumed to be *A. s. nivescens*, which was previously known to occur from south-east Sudan to coastal Kenya. A previous claim of the species in Egypt in 1996 is also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

ON 1 APRIL 1997, during a visit to the Gebel Elba Protected Area, in Egypt's Eastern Desert, near the border with Sudan, a group of at least nine pipits was discovered, by AG, singing and displaying in a narrow, rocky wadi with scattered *Acacia* and other, low vegetation. The wadi is located on the north-east side of Gebel Elba (1435 metres), at 22°13'N 36°23'E. They were immediately identified as Long-billed Pipits. Their behaviour suggested that they were holding territory and possibly attempting to breed. The following morning, SMBD and MBD visited the same area. They concurred with the identification and observed a total of 12 individuals singing and displaying. There is a subsequent record of this species at Gebel Elba, from 5 November 2000; one was observed, by SMBD, very briefly in the open *Acacia* parkland on the plain just north of the mountain.

DESCRIPTION

The following composite description was taken of three to four individuals closely observed by AG.

Size and shape. Appeared similar in size to Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, though direct comparison not possible. Shape closer to Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*, with a proportionately longer tail and longish tarsus combining to produce a tall, upright stance, with the head held up and bill angled above the horizontal.

Upperparts. General coloration closer to Tawny than the richer brown of Richard's Pipit, with a noticeable grey mantle contrasting with the rest of the upperparts and wing-coverts, which were browner. Tail and primaries darker than rest of upperparts. Crown, nape and mantle lightly streaked darker grey. Median coverts edged buff to off-white, creating indistinct wingbar, and second, indistinct, wingbar discernable on greater coverts, which were also edged buff to off-white, but not as distinctly as in Tawny or Richard's Pipits. In flight, the pale brownish outertail feathers were very distinctive, extending as a broad shaft on the distal part of the feather.

Underparts. Generally off-white to dirty white merging into buffish lower belly, flanks and undertail-coverts. Pale, vertical grey streaking across upper breast, broadest at sides.

Head. Quite well marked with a clearly defined, narrow, creamy/white supercilium emanating from base of bill, above eye (duller in front of eye), extending to and curving around rear of ear-coverts. Dark stripe through eye, ear-coverts darker grey/brown than rest of head, lightly streaked. Crown slightly darker; throat paler buff to whitish, whitish moustachial stripe and narrow grey/brown malar stripe.

Bare parts. Bill long and decurved at tip, dark upper mandible and yellow lower mandible with a small dark tip. Legs medium to long, pale pink to straw coloured.

Behaviour and voice. A simple weak song heard, comprising 3–4 notes, a combination of weak

'shree' or 'chree' calls interspersed with a 'cheweet'. Several display flights observed and song also uttered from atop small *Acacia* bushes or on ground. Several chases also observed. Calls heard from ground and in flight, transcribed as a weak 'cheup', completely different from loud, sharp 'tchip tchip' or 'tchlip tchlip' sometimes uttered by Tawny Pipit on ground and in flight, and the more usual and distinctive sparrow-like 'chirrup' or 'cheep' call. Call also wholly different from harsh, drawn-out 'shreeep' of Richard's Pipit.

DISCUSSION

Long-billed Pipit is widespread in southern, East and West Africa, east through Arabia to the Himalayas, India and Burma (Snow & Perrins 1998). It is considered largely sedentary in most areas, which has led to a large number of races being admitted by some authors. Disagreement persists concerning the distribution and salient features of some of these and our discussion therefore endeavours to follow current views.

Races in the Levant, Arabia and north-east Africa, those areas closest to Gebel Elba, vary in general size, have either grey- or buff-edged wing-coverts, variable wing lengths, variable mantle and upper breast streaking, and differ in the extent and tone of the underparts coloration (Keith *et al.* 1992, Snow & Perrins 1998, Clancey 1986). Other distinguishing features, e.g. the relative intensity of grey or buff in the crown, mantle and back, tail length, brightness and extent of the supercilium, exist but due to a lack of detailed descriptions and measurements for each form, herein only those features noted by various authors are examined here. These are summarised in Table 1 and relate to adults in spring, based on published information (Clancey 1986, Cramp 1993, Keith *et al.* 1992), Laird & Gencz 1993, Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1955, Nikolaus 1987, Snow & Perrins 1998, Vaurie 1959).

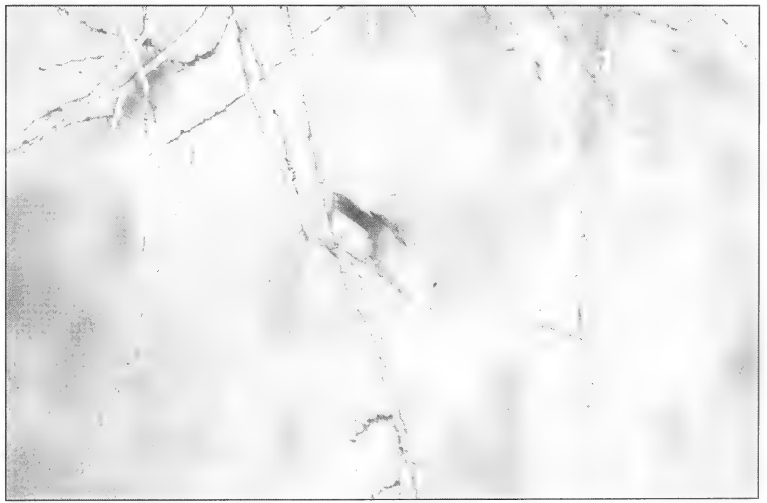
The small size, off-white underparts with buff limited to lower belly and undertail-coverts, and mid-intensity streaking on the upper breast and mantle suggest that those individuals at Gebel Elba belong to the north-east African race, *A. s. nivescens*, which most authorities consider to reach as far north as south-east Sudan. No field observations exist to support the claim of Clancey (1986) that *A. s. arabicus* occurs in Sudan/Ethiopia, nor that *A. s. nivescens* occurs in Yemen and that intergrades between the two forms occur in both north-east Africa and south-west Arabia. The appearance of the Gebel Elba individuals closely accords with published descriptions of *A. s. nivescens* and confirms the presence of that form in north-east Africa, rather than *A. s. arabicus*, which is larger, longer legged with a very upright posture, more heavily streaked, particularly on the mantle, has more extensive buff tones on the underparts, and buff-edged coverts, rather than grey as in those at Gebel Elba.

A. s. nivescens is common to rare from Sudan south to Ethiopia and Eritrea, and possibly coastal Kenya (Ash 1998, van Perlo 1995, Urban & Brown 1971, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996). Its preferred habitat is rocky hillsides with scattered sparse vegetation (Ash 1998). Long-billed Pipit was previously known to occur only as far north as c. 390 km south of Gebel Elba, in the Red Sea mountains of Sudan (Nikolaus 1987, Cave & Macdonald 1955).

Given that ornithological coverage of east Sudan and south Egypt has been limited, a northward spread of Long-billed Pipit, through the Red Sea mountains, or the presence of an outlier population, could easily have remained undetected. A number of Afrotropical species reach their northernmost limits at Gebel Elba, which receives the highest precipitation in the region, over 400 mm annually, supports a relatively

Table 1. Measurements and features of races of Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* in Levant, north-east Africa and Arabia. Claims, based on examination of skins, that *A. s arabicus* occurs in Sudan and *A. s nivescens* in Arabia (Clancey 1986) are not substantiated by the work of subsequent authors. Measurements (wing lengths) were taken from the following sources: (a) Vaurie (1959); (b) Keith *et al.* (1992); (c) Clancey (1986); and (d) Cramp (1993).

Race	Range	Size	Upperparts	Wing	Legs	Mantle	Underparts	Breast	Head
captus	Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Israel	Small	Grey-edged coverts	♂ 95–97 (a) ♂ 94–98 (d) ♀ 89–92 (d)	Short	Streaking pale/dull	Dull pale grey, not as buff	Lightly streaked	Poorly marked
decaptus	Iran, Pakistan Afghanistan (winter in north Oman?)	Large	Buff-edged coverts	♂ 99–105 (a) ♂ 94–105 (d) ♀ 95–101 (d)	Long	Streaking bolder	Dull white to buff, can be extensively buff	More heavily streaked	Boldly marked
arabicus	South-west Saudi Arabia, west Yemen, north Oman and United Arab Emirates	Large	Buff-edged coverts	♂ 96–105 (c) ♀ (93) (c)	Long	Streaking bolder	Extensively buff	Lightly streaked	Boldly marked
nivescens	North-east Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, north Kenya	Small	Grey-edged coverts	♂ 90–98 (b) ♂ 93.0–99.5(c) ♀ 85.0–91.5(c)	Medium	Streaking bolder	Off-white, buff restricted to lower belly and undertail-coverts	Moderately streaked	Boldly marked



Plates 1–2. Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*, Gebel Elba, south-east Egypt, 1 April 1997. *(Andrew Grieve)*

rich flora (Baha El Din 1999) and offers suitable habit for the species, as evidenced by the song and display noted.

Few data concerning the nesting season of Long-billed Pipit in East Africa are available; Ash & Miskell (1998) report that breeding in Somalia has been recorded in March. The behaviour of those at Gebel Elba conforms to known breeding behaviour (Snow & Perrins 1998), 'for song-flight, the male usually ascends from a perch with quivering wings; ascends (while singing) to considerable height and may stay aloft for several minutes'. Given the subsequent sighting, in November, on the Gebel Elba plain, it is probable that Long-billed Pipit is resident in the region, as the species is known to descend to lower elevations in the winter in Sudan (Cave & Macdonald 1953), and the Western Palearctic (Snow & Perrins 1998).

There is a previous claim of Long-billed Pipit for Egypt, by J. M. Bayldon, on 24 September 1996. Two large, bulky pipits were observed while he was birding on the Red Sea island of Giftun Kebir, offshore from Hurghada. They were on a small plateau 300 metres from the shore and were approached to within 20 metres. The following salient features were noted for the presumed adult, and subsequently attributed to Long-billed Pipit.

Size and shape. Similar to Richard's Pipit. Upright stance with bill held above the horizontal.
Head. Face almost featureless, dull white supercilium tapering at rear; very thin dusky eye-stripe behind dark eye and not noticed on lores. Ear-coverts pale buff-brown, no detectable outline to ear-coverts. Moustachial stripe only visible at close range, a thin malar stripe, terminating well short of the bill. Chin and throat creamy.
Upperparts. Crown, nape, mantle and scapulars grey-brown with diffuse dull brown streaking only visible at close range. Median coverts with black/brown centres, more diffuse on inner feathers, pale buff-white tips and edges. Greater coverts had brown centres with pale buff fringes (fine) and tips forming a very narrow wingbar (not obvious). Tertials diffuse black/brown with broad pale buff fringing (not sharp). Secondaries had pale buff fringing to black/ brown feathers forming pale panel. Primaries black/brown. Tail dark brown, central feathers darkest with buff fringing. No white detected in the tail when flushed or upon subsequent landing.
Underparts. Creamy with pale grey-buff wash to breast-sides and flanks; breast with sparse diffuse streaking only noted at close range
Bare parts. Eyes dark, legs pale yellow to flesh brown, bill stout with distinctive downward curve, brown-horn above, yellow-flesh below, dark tip
Voice. When flushed called 'tchip tchip', on ground also a 'tchip' but one gave a dry 'djeep'.

The other individual was considered to be a juvenile and was similar to the adult, but possessed sharper markings to the upperparts, wings and breast, with feathers edged and tipped cinnamon, and underparts uniform pale cinnamon.

This description does not conform to *A. s nivescens*, which is smaller than 'Richard's Pipit' and has a more distinctly marked head, mantle and upper breast. The lack of buff on the underparts of one appears to preclude *A. s. arabicus*, which is one of the largest races but has generally more buff underparts and a more heavily marked head and mantle with buff-fringed wing-coverts. The presumed juvenile had uniform pale cinnamon underparts with apparently strongly cinnamon-edged feathers, and being large might favour *A. s. arabicus*, but the overall description is insufficient to establish the identification.

The large size—'Richard's Pipit size'—of those at Hurghada, combined with the lack of mention of the proportionately much shorter legs, appears to eliminate the Levant race, *A s. captus*, which is one of the smallest races (see Table 1) and perhaps the most

likely to occur in the northern Red Sea. The nearest breeding areas of *captus* are in central Jordan and north Israel, c. 450 km distant, but this race is largely sedentary, performing only limited altitudinal movements in winter, the longest thus far recorded being 30 km, in Israel (Shirihai 1996). However, the species has wandered to Cyprus, involving a movement of 250 km from the nearest breeding grounds, in north Lebanon, if the individual concerned was *captus* (Snow & Perrins 1998). No details of its racial identify have been published. Records of vagrants in Iraq and Kuwait probably refer to *A. s. decaptus* from Iran or Afghanistan, which is partially migratory in some of its range (Paludan 1959, Snow & Perrins 1998). Thus, the racial identity of the Hurghada sighting requires clarification prior to potential acceptance of the record.

It should be noted that both Richard's and Tawny Pipits occur as passage migrants in Egypt. The former is rare, but regular in autumn, mainly in south Sinai. Tawny Pipit is a relatively common passage migrant throughout the country and a scarce winter visitor (Goodman & Meininger 1989).

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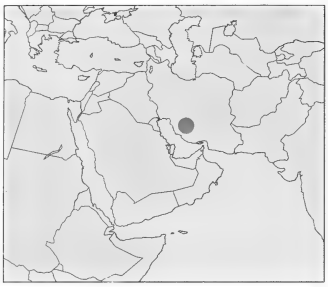
Andrew Grieve, Hillcrest, Whitgift, near Goole, East Yorkshire, DN14 8HL, U. K.
Mindy and Sherif M. Baha El Din, 3 Abdalla El Katib St., Apt. 3, Dokki, Cairo, Egypt.

Some interesting bird observations from the coast of Iran, January–February 2000

GUIDO O. KEIJL, TOM M. VAN DER HAVE, JAMSHID MANSOORI AND VLADIMIR V. MOROZOV



Observations of 15 species, made during a survey of wetlands on Iran's Arabian Gulf coast, in January–February 2000, are presented. These included two potential first records in Iran, Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and Brown-throated Sand Martin *Riparia paludicola*, an apparently important wintering area for Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*, records of several vagrants and scarce winter visitors, and a potentially significant range extension for the near-endemic Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*. In addition, the area surveyed appears to be of considerable significance to wintering waterbirds, particularly waders. More than 53,000 waterbirds of 82 species were counted during the survey, including globally threatened species such as Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, and White-tailed *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Greater Spotted *Aquila clanga* and Imperial Eagles *A. heliaca*.

HERE WE PRESENT INTERESTING records of bird species observed during a visit to the south coast of Iran, between Jask in the south and the Hilleh River Delta in the north-west, between 12 January and 3 February 2000. Most concern species considered rare in Iran, or have not previously been observed there, according to Porter *et al.* (1996). Coordinates were taken in the field with a Global Positioning System. A complete list of species observed is published in van der Have *et al.* (2001). Observations were made while surveying coastal waders, in 21 wetlands, with special attention to Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*. The project was organised by the Working Group International Waterbird and Wetland Research (WIWO), in cooperation with the Department of the Environment, Tehran.

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Shikra *Accipiter badius*

On 24 January an immature passed overhead, at c. 10 metres distance, near Bandar Khamir. Although the observation was brief (probably not more than five seconds), the following characters were seen: yellow iris, vertical throat stripe, relatively short rounded wings (resembling Sparrowhawk *A. nisus*), limited dark on the wingtips not sharply demarcated from rest of underwing, spotted underparts and rather plain, pale underwings. Levant Sparrowhawk *A. brevipes* was eliminated on the basis of the positive observation of the yellow iris and rounded wings, and Sparrowhawk, of which c. 20 were seen during the trip including several the same day, on the basis of the spotted underparts, throat stripe and dark wingtips. No attention was paid to tail shape and bands on the uppertail could not be seen. Porter *et al.* (1996) consider Shikra to be rare in winter in the south-east of the country, but D. A. Scott (*in litt.* February 2001) reports that it is not that uncommon in east and south Iran, and is

apparently present year-round in the south. Another individual, an adult, was observed, on 1–2 February, at Koreband, near Hilleh Protected Area.

Booted Eagle ***Hieraaetus pennatus***
On 3 February a light morph was seen well near the border of Hilleh Protected Area. Apparently, Booted Eagle was not mentioned for Iran at this season (Porter *et al.* 1996), but D. A. Scott (*in litt.* February 2001) had several winter records in the 1970s, principally in the extreme south-east (Persian Baluchistan).

Spur-winged Plover ***Hoplopterus spinosus***
Three were seen at a refuse dump, beside the road from Akhvaz to Abadan, on the outskirts of Akhvaz, Khuzestan province, on 14 January. They were observed for c. 10 minutes as they fed among garbage. Diagnostic characters observed were the black upper head, breast and upper belly, brown upperparts, and white cheeks and vent. They were easily separated from nearby Red-wattled Plovers *H. indicus*. According to Porter *et al.* (1996) Spur-winged Plover is a vagrant in Iran, although it has apparently been discovered breeding in the south-west of the country in recent years (D. A. Scott *in litt.* February 2001).

Pacific Golden Plover ***Pluvialis fulva***
One observation: on 29 January a flock of eight individuals, three of which still possessed juvenile plumage on the upperparts (being a rich golden colour), were observed on mudflats among mangroves in Hara Protected Area (26°46'N 55°43'E). The species is considered a vagrant in the country, according to Porter *et al.* (1996), but because of its regular appearance in other countries bordering the Arabian Gulf in winter (e.g. Bahrain, Hirschfeld 1995; United Arab Emirates, Richardson 1990, Keijl *et al.* 1998) it is probably more common in Iran than previously thought. Indeed, D. A. Scott (*in litt.* February 2001) reports that he had several records in the 1970s and the species appears to be a regular winter visitor in small numbers to coastal Persian Baluchistan. However, our record represents the largest single flock and probably the westernmost record.

Knot ***Calidris canutus***
On 26 January, 12 Knots were observed feeding and resting on mudflats near Tijab (27°04'N 56°47'E), at a distance of c. 30 metres. All were in winter plumage. Important identification characters were the overall size (for instance, larger than Dunlin *C. alpina* and Sanderling *C. alba*, but smaller than Redshank *Tringa totanus*, all of which were in the immediate vicinity) and shape, stubby, straight black bill and greenish legs. The observation constitutes the fifth, but first documented and winter record in Iran. Kirwan (1996) listed all previous observations, in March and September 1961, and March and August 1963. Elsewhere in the Arabian Gulf the species is very rare and we know of only two records: one in summer plumage at Al Awamiyah, Saudi Arabia, on 9 April 1991 (Evans & Keijl 1993), and one at Shuqaiq, on 28 April 1993 (Kirwan 1996). Aspinall (1994) drew attention to the possibility that the few other claims of Knot from the Arabian Gulf (see list of such rejected reports in Kirwan 1996) could have been misidentified Great Knots *C. tenuirostris*. A regular wintering site for Knot appears to exist in south-east India, in the Gulf of Mannar, where up to 300 are counted each winter (Balachandran 1998). Interestingly, Balachandran (1998) supposed that these Knots belong to the east Siberian subspecies *C. c. rogersi*, based on mensural data. Knots reaching the Arabian Gulf could therefore be individuals that have 'missed' their Indian wintering grounds. However, measurements of the Indian Knots appear to better fit those breeding on the Taimyr Peninsula or the New Siberian Islands, which belong to *C. c. canutus* (Tomkovich 1992).

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*
On 26 January, during a low-tide count on a mudflat near Tijab (27°04'N 56°47'E), two foraging individuals in winter plumage were observed through telescopes for several minutes at a distance of c. 100–200 metres. Principal identification features were the large size (almost as large as the nearby Redshank), heavy, 'pot-bellied' appearance, medium-long, slightly decurved bill, and a few black spots on the breast-sides. Due to the relative distance and light conditions, leg colour could not be established. It is known that small numbers regularly winter in the Arabian Gulf (Aspinall 1994) and Oman (Green *et al.* 1994), but to our knowledge, this is the first documented record in Iran.

Caspian *Larus cachinnans* and Heuglin's Gulls *L. heuglini*
Large gulls of these taxa were present almost everywhere along the coast, but the largest numbers were counted, on 27 January, at Azini Khur (4620). These forms could not always be identified with certainty, as differences in mantle colour could be difficult to establish due to light conditions, and because attention was principally focused on waders. Only on a few occasions was special attention was paid to these forms, and only adults were specifically identified.

Caspian Gull (n=168) was identified on the basis of smaller size, paler grey upperparts, bright yellow legs, yellow, grey or dark iris colour, and relatively long bill in comparison with Heuglin's Gull. Heuglin's Gull (n=51) was identified by its large size, heavy bill and darker upperparts (like Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. graellsii*) than Caspian Gull.

Apart from these taxa, no other large white-headed gulls were identified, except for two large gulls near Bandar Rig, which exhibited characters of Armenian Gull *L. armenicus*. These had a medium-dark grey mantle, dark iris, bright yellow legs and a dark vertical band across the tip of bill (gonys). However, they were almost the size of a Heuglin's Gull and thus appeared too large for this species. Armenian Gull is a common breeding bird on Lake Urumieh in the north of the country (Evans 1994), but is certainly not common in the Arabian Gulf in winter (Hirschfeld 1995, Symens & Alsuhaibany 1996, pers. obs.).

cuckoo sp. *Cuculus* sp.
On 31 January an unidentified cuckoo was seen from the car between Bul Heir and Bushehr. It perched on an electricity wire beside the road. It was approximately the size of a Common Cuckoo *C. canorus*, with grey upperparts, long tail, long pointed wings, held slightly drooped, and a small head with a small pointed bill. The underparts were not seen. No cuckoos are known to occur in Iran in winter (Porter *et al.* 1996), and one of only two species is likely to have been involved: Common Cuckoo, which is a summer visitor to the north of the country and winters on the Indian subcontinent and in Africa, and Indian Cuckoo *C. micropterus*, which is a resident on the Indian subcontinent. Other species which are impossible to eliminate, however, are Horsfield's *C. horsfieldi* and (the smaller) Asian Lesser Cuckoo *C. poliocephalus* (Payne 1997).

Brown-throated Sand Martin *Riparia paludicola*
Two observations: on 27 January, four near Azini harbour and, on 1 February, four in Hilleh Protected Area. Although both flocks were observed only briefly, Sand Martin *R. riparia* could be eliminated due to the dark throat and lack of a breast-band in all individuals. The upperparts were much paler than Sand Martins breeding in Europe.

Differences in tail pattern were not established. This would be the first record of a species whose nearest breeding grounds are in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The subspecies involved would probably be *R. p. chinensis*, which is small and pale.

Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*
According to Porter *et al.* (1996), Mourning Wheatear is a summer visitor in Iran, but according to Cramp (1988) it also winters in very small numbers. Apart from Eastern Pied Wheatear *O. p. picata*, which was ubiquitous, we observed at least 41 individuals of other wheatear species. Four were identified as Mourning Wheatear, one being seen in flight, showing much white in the flight feathers, on 23 January, south of Bandar Moguye, and three, on 31 January, between Kangan and Bul Heir.

Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*
One was seen and heard at Bord Khum, on 31 January. The winter distribution of this species in the Middle East is still little known, but it is apparently a common winter visitor to Persian Baluchistan, west to the region of Bandar Abbas (D. A. Scott *in litt.* February 2001). Records further west along the coast are not unexpected, as there is at least one winter record from lower Iraq (Scott & Carp 1982).

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*
On 2 February one was heard calling several times in reedbeds along the Hilleh River. Penduline Tit breeds in north and north-west Iran, but the Hilleh River area is outside the range of this species according to the map in Porter *et al.* (1996).

Iraq Babbler *Turdoides altirostris*
Not certainly observed, but a single unidentified babbler was seen briefly in reedbeds at Hilleh Protected Area, on 3 February. Although Common Babbler *T. caudatus* is common throughout desert areas and cultivation in Iran, it apparently does not occur in marshland and reedbeds, habitat characteristic of Iraq Babbler. Given this, it is interesting to record that a single stuffed babbler in the bird exhibition of the Bushehr Research Center, Department of the Environment, in Bushehr, which apparently displays birds collected in the region, is an Iraq Babbler. Occurrence in Hilleh Protected Area would be a significant range extension for this near-endemic species.

Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*
On 2–3 February several flocks containing hundreds of Dead Sea Sparrow were seen in Hilleh Protected Area, mixed with Spanish Sparrows *P. hispaniolensis*. Although several individuals were closely scrutinised, the race *yattii* was not observed. Dead Sea Sparrow is a species with a restricted range and occurs only in the Middle East (Evans 1994). The wintering areas are largely unknown (Cramp & Perrins 1994, Snow & Perrins 1998). Considering the number seen in a relatively small area, the Hilleh River Delta and probably other areas on the north side of the Arabian Gulf appear to be important wintering areas (Evans 1994).

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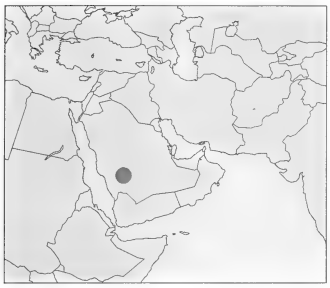
Guido O. Keijl and Tom M. van der Have, Working Group International Wader and Waterbird Research (WIWO), P. O. Box 925, 3700 AX Zeist, The Netherlands.*
** (Corresponding author: Brederodestraat 16a, 1901 HW, Bakkum, The Netherlands.)*
Jamshid Mansoori, Department of the Environment, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran.
Vladimir V. Morozov, Zoological Museum, Moscow, Russia.

Notes on the breeding biology of some Arabian birds

PETER CASTELL, JEFFORY COBURN, BERNARD PLEASANCE AND STEVEN WILLIAMS



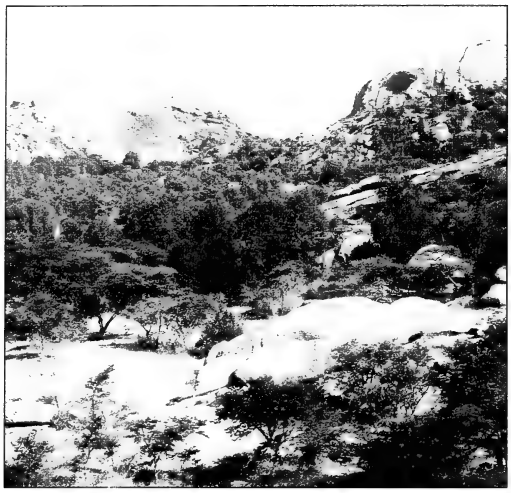
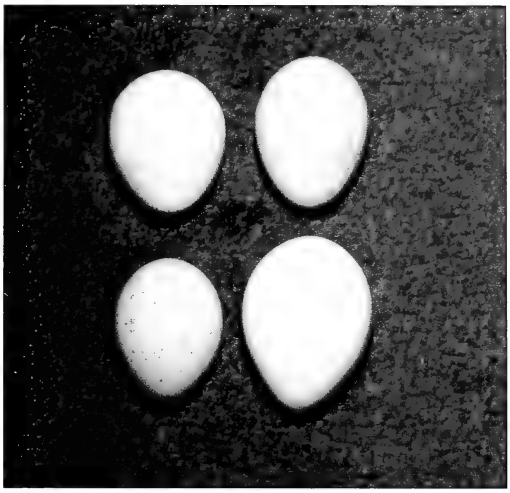
We describe the nestlings of eight species: Philby's Partridge *Alectoris philbyi*, Arabian Partridge *A. melanocephala*, Little Rock Thrush *Monticola rufocinerea*, Yemen Thrush *Turdus menachensis*, Gambaga Flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae*, Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchloris*, Arabian Serin *Serinus rothschildi* and Yemen Linnet *Carduelis yemenensis*; while the nestling of Yemen Warbler *Parisoma buryi* is described in more detail than previously, with particular reference to mouth markings. New (or corrected) descriptions, with measurements, are presented for the eggs of the *Alectoris* partridges, Yemen Warbler, Arabian Golden Sparrow and Arabian Serin. The nest of Arabian Serin is described for the first time, and more detailed descriptions than were previously available are included for the nests of Little Rock Thrush, Yemen Thrush, Yemen Warbler, Gambaga Flycatcher, Arabian Golden Sparrow and Yemen Linnet. New information on several other aspects of breeding biology are also included.

THIS PAPER PRESENTS RESULTS FROM AN 18-day visit to south-west Saudi Arabia, in June 2000, to study avian breeding biology in the Asir Highlands, especially of the ten landbirds endemic to Arabia. Localities visited included the National Wildlife Research Centre, near Taif, montane areas near Tanumah, the Raydah Escarpment Reserve, near Abha, and coastal Tihamah, near Abu Arish, close to the Yemen border. We present the first descriptions of nestlings of eight species plus a more detailed description than currently exists for another (six of these are endemic to Arabia); the first detailed descriptions and measurements of the eggs of five species and more detailed descriptions than currently exist for two others (four Arabian endemics); the first description of the nest of the endemic Arabian Serin; more detailed descriptions than currently exist for the nests of a further six species (four endemic to Arabia); and many additional details for several aspects of breeding biology. Unless otherwise stated the breeding biology information presented within each species account is novel and adds to, or clarifies, existing data.

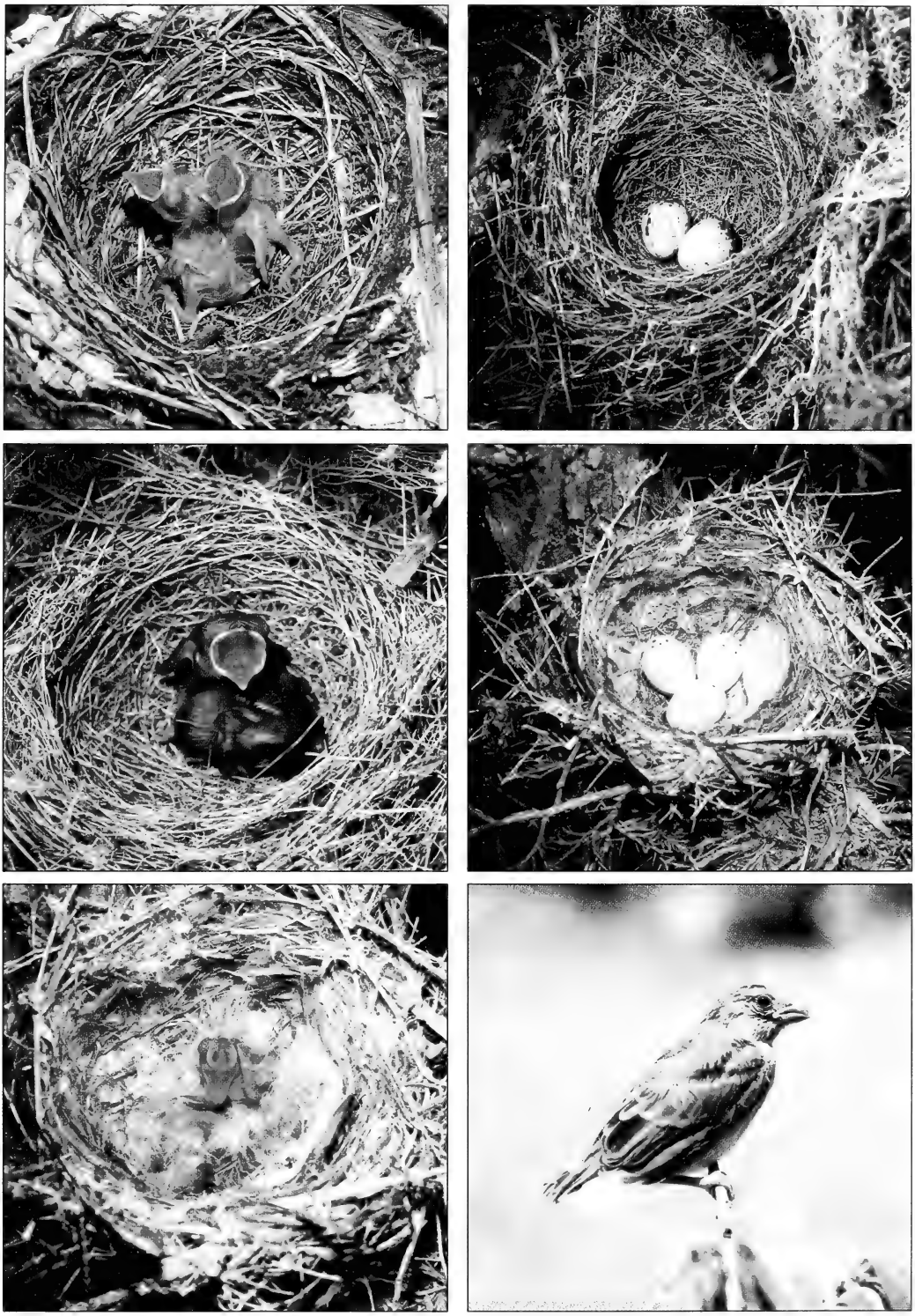
Philby's *Alectoris philbyi* and Arabian Partridges *A. melanocephala*

Meinertzhagen (1954) briefly described the eggs of both species, but presented incorrect data for Arabian Partridge. At the National Wildlife Research Centre, near Taif, there is a captive-breeding programme for both species. We were shown many adults, their eggs and young at various stages.

Philby's Partridge has short sub-elliptical to short oval eggs that are smooth and glossy; white to pale buff, spotted or with scattered blotches of pale purple or brown. Three eggs measured 40.1 x 31.7 mm, 42.6 x 35 mm and 45.5 x 33.9 mm. Incubation period (in incubators) 25 days (P. Paillat pers. comm.). Young precocial and downy. Down creamy-buff on nape, cheeks, chin, throat, breast and rest of underparts. Top of head pale buffish brown, slightly paler above eye and on lower forehead. Narrow horizontal dark line from rear of eye to nape. Back largely pale brown, mottled with fine blackish-brown markings, and three parallel cream stripes along most of its length, the central one slightly longer, and a dark-edged cream wing-stripe. Bill pink, darker at base; legs and feet orange-pink; claws brown; iris brown. In larger young, bill black, legs and feet greyish pink, darker on upper side of toes; claws black. At 6–8 weeks, they are brownish, finely barred above, with faint black chin and throat beginning to appear; legs pinkish-white, distinctly paler than those of adults (Rands 1987).

Plates 1–6. (top left) Juniper forest, with some *Acacia*, in rocky montane country at Tanumah, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(top right)** Eggs of Philby's Partridge *Alectoris philbyi* (three) and Arabian Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala* (one), N.W.R.C., Taif, Saudi Arabia. **(middle left)** Young Philby's Partridge *Alectoris philbyi*, aged two days, N.W.R.C., Taif, Saudi Arabia. **(middle right)** Young Philby's Partridge *Alectoris philbyi*, aged 3–4 weeks, N.W.R.C., Taif, Saudi Arabia. **(bottom left)** Young Arabian Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala*, aged 3–4 days, N.W.R.C., Taif, Saudi Arabia. **(bottom right)** Nest and eggs of Yemen Thrush *Turdus menachensis*, Raydah Escarpment Nature Reserve, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. (all by *Peter Castell*, June 2000)



Plates 7–12. (top left) Nestlings of Yemen Thrush *Turdus menachensis*, aged 1–2 days, near Tanumah, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(top right)** Nest and eggs of Yemen Warbler *Parisoma buryi*, Raydah Escarpment Nature Reserve, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(middle left)** Newly hatched nestlings of Yemen Warbler *Parisoma buryi*, Raydah Escarpment Nature Reserve, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(middle right)** Nest and eggs of Arabian Serin *Serinus rothschildi*, near Tanumah, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(bottom left)** Newly hatched nestlings of Arabian Serin *Serinus rothschildi*, near Tanumah, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(bottom right)** Recently fledged Arabian Serin *Serinus rothschildi*, near Tanumah, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. (all by *Peter Castell*, June 2000)

Arabian Partridge has oval to short oval eggs, smooth and glossy; white. One measured 50.3 x 37.3 mm. Incubation period (in incubators) 25 days (P. Paillat pers. comm.). Young precocial and downy. Down whitish buff on lower forehead, nape, cheeks, chin, throat and rest of underparts. Top of head brown, with broad rufous-buff stripe above eye from bill to nape. Narrow dark brown line from bill above eye, reaching from rear of eye to nape. Upper breast-sides rufous-buff. Back mottled rufous and blackish brown, with parallel dark-edged whitish stripes on either side, and a cream wing-stripe. At hatching, legs and feet orange-pink, grey at upper edges of outer toes, claws pinkish-brown, bill pink, soon becoming black, iris brown. In larger young, legs and feet greyish pink, greyer on feet; claws brown. At distance brown crown of larger young should facilitate field identification between the two species.

Little Rock Thrush ***Monticola rufocinerea***
At Tanumah, on 5–6 June, we found two nests, both in cavities within trees, one and two metres above ground. One was being constructed and the other contained two nestlings c. 5–6 days old. Both sites resembled those of Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, in large, relatively level, light and open holes, with the nests clearly visible.

Nest. Differs in external size according to available space within cavities, but diameter of inner cup c. 5 cm in both. A cup of moss, twigs, grasses, lichens and thin strips of bark, lined with finer grass, hair and feathers. **Nestling.** Altricial and downy. Skin orange-pink. Brown down relatively long; on head, back and wings. Mouth orange-yellow. Gape flanges pale yellow.

Yemen Thrush ***Turdus menachensis***
Endemic to the highlands of south-west Arabia, where it frequents forests, orchards and gardens (Bowden 1987a). At Tanumah and Raydah we found three active nests, containing two small young, two eggs and two eggs, watched a nest being constructed, observed adults with food, found many empty nests and a considerable number of pairs.

Identification of adult males and females. Detailed description provided by Bowden (1987a). Porter *et al.* (1996) make no reference to sexual dimorphism. Though lacking firm evidence, we consider adult males to be distinctly darker than females, with much brighter yellow bills; these differences being similar to, but not as pronounced, as in Blackbird *Turdus merula*. All observed pairs comprised one of each type, all singing individuals were apparently male, and all those seen nest-building, incubating or brooding were apparently female. Any reference to the role of the sexes below is solely based on these apparent differences.

Nest site. All nests were 2–4 metres above ground in tree forks of mature juniper, usually well concealed by branches or hanging lichen. Previous records include other trees and shrubs, as well as in a wall masked by vegetation (Jennings 1995). **Nest.** A firm cup of grass, small twigs, moss and thin strips of bark, sometimes with paper and moss around the rim; a layer of mud forms the interior, which is lined by fine grasses, occasionally intermixed with fine rootlets. Outer diameter 15 cm, inner cup 9 cm. An old, unused nest was removed to confirm materials used. **Nest-building.** One female observed to carry nesting material to a half-built nest on 19 occasions in 30 minutes. Male accompanied only once and did not carry material or build. **Clutch size.** Previous records comprise up to three eggs. Of three active nests, with two eggs or young, one clutch was incomplete when we left. **Eggs.** Sub-elliptical, smooth and glossy; pale blue with variable reddish-brown spots and blotches; markings evenly

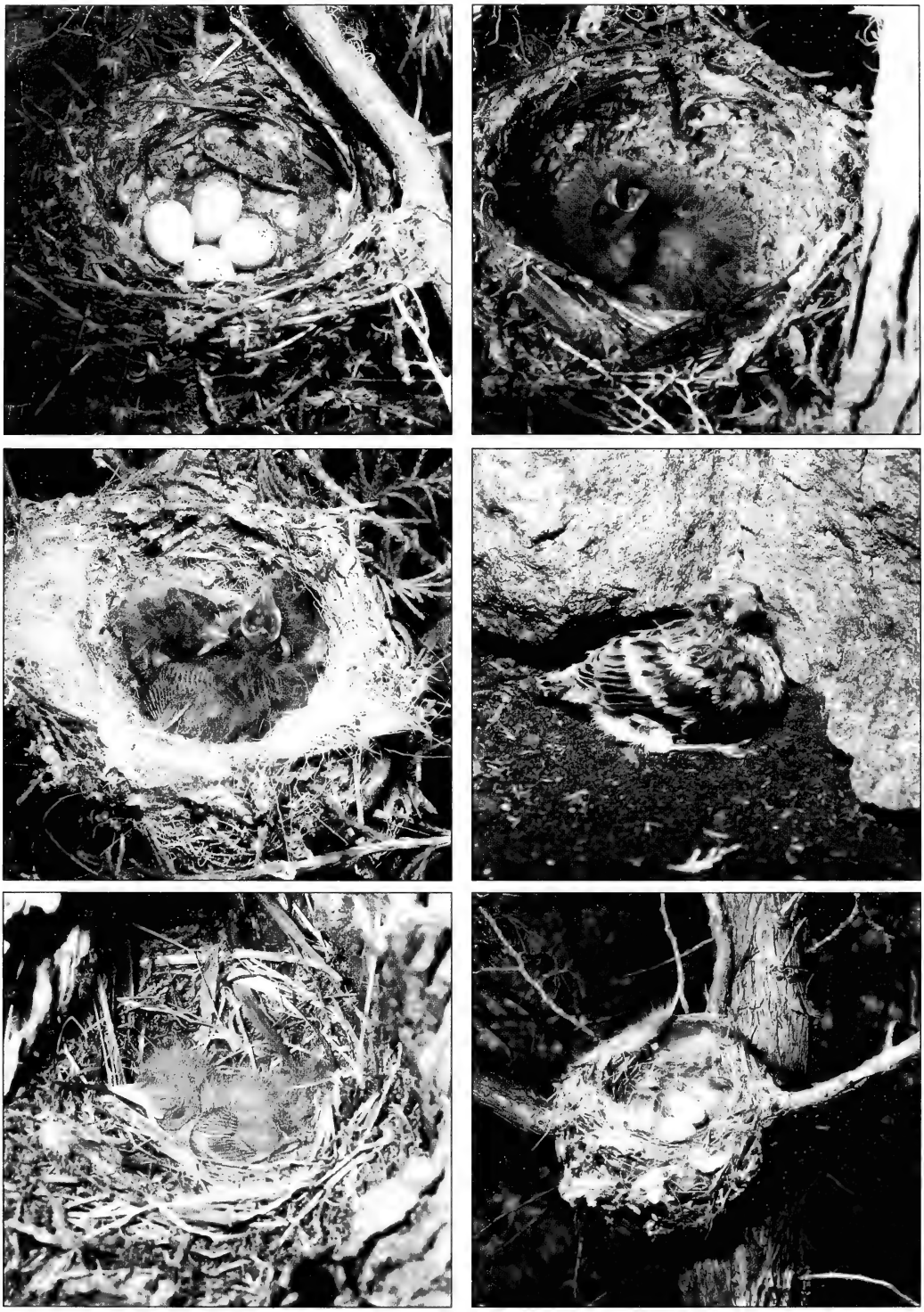
distributed but denser at larger end. In one nest, two eggs measured 26.5 x 18.6 mm and 27.1 x 18.8 mm, and two eggs in another were 27.1 x 21.1 mm and 27.9 x 21.3 mm (note significant difference in width). **Incubation.** Only females (observed on many occasions). At one nest, recently hatched young of similar size suggest incubation commences with laying of final egg; incubation at another nest had not commenced on laying of second egg. Period unknown. **Nestling.** Newly hatched nestlings altricial and downy. Long buff down is relatively sparse; on head, back and rear edge of wings. Skin orange-pink. Mouth and tongue orange-yellow; throat pink. Gape flanges pale yellow. **Care of young.** Both members of a pair observed carrying food, and several pairs alarm calling. Fledging period unknown.

Yemen Warbler *Parisoma buryi*

Endemic to the highlands of south-west Arabia, where it breeds in bushy thickets and trees (Brooks 1987, Jennings 1995, Porter *et al.* 1996). It is now generally considered to be a *Sylvia*, its closest relatives being Brown *Sylvia* [formerly *Parisoma*] *lugens* and Arabian Warblers *S. leucomelaena* (Shirihai *et al.* in press). On 5–7 June, at Tanumah, we found approximately five empty nests, all in dense bushy cover, 0.2–1.5 m above ground. On two occasions, we observed and heard adults alarm calling with food, presumably having dependent young nearby. On 8 June, near the summit of Raydah Escarpment Nature Reserve, we discovered a nest with two eggs being incubated. This was 2.6 metres above ground in a juniper 3.5 metres high. The eggs hatched on 13 June. Two empty nests were located nearby, both c. 1 metre above ground in dense juniper.

Nest. A thin, flimsy cup of very fine twigs, grass, roots and some lichen; outer diameter 9 cm, inner cup 6 cm. Previously described as unlined (Brooks 1987), but in some there is a sparse lining of finer rootlets and some hair. One was partially screened by, and attached to, hanging lichen. **Eggs.** Only previous record of an active nest contained three young. Clutch size apparently 2–3. Eggs short sub-elliptical, smooth and glossy; white, with small, heavy dark blotching at larger end, and sparse, heavy or light, brown spotting elsewhere, often longitudinally elongated. Two eggs measured 19.6 x 15.1 mm and 19.5 x 14.9 mm. **Incubation.** We were unable to determine the sex of the incubating individual despite extremely close views. Period unknown. As both young evidently hatched on same day, incubation presumably commenced with laying of final (in this case second) egg. **Nestling.** Newly hatched young altricial and naked. Skin purple, paler on nape. Mouth and tongue orange-yellow. Gape flanges pale yellow. Two elongated dark, but rather faint, markings near base of tongue, broader at base where they merge, then tapering and continuing as a less distinct dark line, converging near tip. A further indistinct dark line leads from the tip along the centre of the tongue, dividing into two, which join the main larger markings near the base. **Care of young.** Both adults observed carrying food. Fledging period unknown.

Comparison with mouth markings of other *Sylvia*. Mouth markings on nestling *Sylvia* species are complex and differ between species. There are two dark elongated or oval markings near the base of the tongue; in some species, these markings blend, blur or continue as faint markings or lines to form a triangular shaped pattern with one corner near the tip of the tongue (Harrison & Castell 1998). While mouth markings on nestling Yemen Warblers are generally similar to those of other *Sylvia*, the species is safely identifiable by the additional, indistinct dark line from the tip along the centre of the tongue, which is absent in other *Sylvia*. It would be interesting to compare this feature with other (former) *Parisoma* species, but data do not appear to be available.



Plates 13–18. (top left) Nest and eggs of Yemen Linnet *Carduelis yemenensis*, Raydah Escarpment Reserve near Abha, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(top right)** Newly-hatched young of Yemen Linnet *Carduelis yemenensis*, Raydah Escarpment Reserve, near Abha, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(middle left)** Nestlings (aged two days) of Yemen Linnet *Carduelis yemenensis*, Raydah Escarpment Reserve near Abha, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(middle right)** Fledgling, incapable of sustained flight, Yemen Linnet *Carduelis yemenensis*, Raydah Escarpment Reserve near Abha, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(bottom left)** Nestlings of Little Rock Thrush *Monticola rufocinerea*, near Tanumah, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(bottom right)** Nest and eggs of Gambaga Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae*, near Tanumah, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. (all by *Peter Castell*, June 2000)

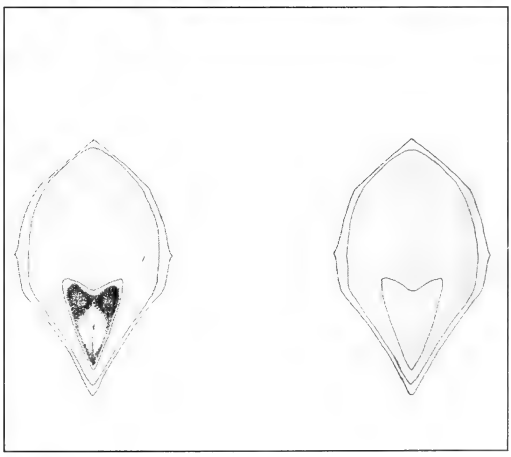


Figure 1. Mouth markings on the tongue of newly hatched Yemen Warbler *Parisoma buryi*. (*Richard Castell*)

Plates 19–23. (top left) Recently hatched young of Gambaga Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae*, near Tanumah, south-west highlands, Saudi Arabia. **(top right)** Colony of Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchloris*, Tihamah, Saudi Arabia. **(middle left)** Nest of Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchloris*, Tihamah, Saudi Arabia. **(middle right)** Eggs of Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchloris*, temporarily removed from nest for photography and measurement, Tihamah, Saudi Arabia. **(bottom)** Recently fledged young Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchloris*, Tihamah, Saudi Arabia. (all by *Peter Castell*, June 2000)

Gambaga Flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae*
We present the first description of a nestling, a detailed description of a nest and one aspect of incubation. On 6 June, at Tanumah, we found four nests (two containing two eggs, one with a single egg, and another under construction). All were in juniper, 2–3 metres above ground. Two were on lateral branches, the other two in forks. On 14 June, the nest with one egg contained two eggs, and we found a fifth nest, in an *Acacia* fork, at two metres, containing two recently hatched young; incubation was still in progress in the nests containing two eggs.

Nest. Small neat cup of fine grass, thin twigs and sometimes thin strips of bark and plant down, bound with spider webs, lined with finer grasses, plant down, feathers and hair. **Incubation.** Not commenced at nest containing one egg. Recently hatched young had hatched synchronously. Incubation commences, therefore, upon laying of final (second) egg. Incubation period and role of sexes therein unknown. **Nestling.** Recently hatched nestling altricial and downy. Skin dark purple, paler on neck and throat. Down long, scanty and brown; on head, back and sides and rear of wings. Mouth orange-yellow. Gape flanges whitish yellow.

Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchloris*
Breeds on coastal Tihamah of Arabia (from Jeddah to east of Aden), and locally on coast of Somalia on opposite shore of Red Sea (Bowden 1987b, Urban *et al.* 1997). On 10 June between Gharif and Sabya we found an occupied colony comprising 500–1000 pairs in *Acacia* trees. We also found two other, much smaller, colonies near Abu Arish on the same date, but both were inactive. In the active colony, the trees were festooned with nests, not only those of Arabian Golden Sparrow, but also some Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula*. Nests were principally in the upper and outer branches, 2–4 metres above ground, usually c. 1 metre apart, but many closer and some even touching. Examined nests held mostly large young, but many had eggs.

Nest. Distinctive and black in appearance. Domed and oval, c. 40 x 30 cm, with an entrance placed high or low on side. Outer structure of thorny twigs, up to 30 cm long, and sometimes *Acacia* pods, generally resembling a small Magpie *Pica pica* nest. Inner structure domed, or partially so; constructed of grass and some leaves, lined with finer grasses and some wool, feathers and scraps of paper or cloth. Both sexes build. **Clutch size.** We examined c. 25 nests: most had two eggs or two young, several only one, and one had three eggs. **Eggs.** Sub-elliptical to short sub-elliptical, smooth and glossy; white with profuse short scrawling, small blotches or speckling of dark and pale brown. Two eggs in same nest 18 x 14 mm and 16.8 x 13.3 mm. **Incubation.** By female. Period unknown. **Nestlings.** Altricial and naked. Mouth and tongue reddish pink. Gape flanges yellow. Larger nestlings and fledglings generally resemble adult female, but legs and feet flesh-pink (much paler than adult female), and bill yellowish pink (brown in adult female). **Care of young.** Both sexes tend young, but fledging period unknown. **Season.** Apparently principally in spring, March–June (Jennings 1995, Urban *et al.* 1997).

Arabian Serin *Serinus rothschildi*
Endemic to western Arabia, breeding in highlands with significant growth of trees and shrubs (Porter *et al.* 1996). At Tanumah we found two occupied nests, a few empty, but recently used, nests, and observed recently fledged young. All nests were in juniper (the dominant tree species in the area), typically 2–4 metres above ground, and either against main trunk or near the end of a branch. The first contained three eggs when found on 5 June. On 7 June there were two newly hatched young and an

egg that hatched within the next two hours; all three nestlings were acquiring feathers by 14–15 June. The second nest contained fully feathered young on 7 June. Recently fledged young, still incapable of sustained flight, found on 5 June.

Nest. Compact cup (external diameter 8 cm, inner cup 4.5 cm) of small thorny twigs, grass, strips of bark and some spider webs, and lined with finer material, including plant down, grass, hair and string. Hair was possibly that of Hamadryas Baboon *Papio hamadryas arabicus*, which was common in the area. Role of sexes in construction unknown. **Eggs.** Clutch size apparently 2–3. Eggs sub-elliptical, smooth and glossy; very pale blue, spotted and speckled pale brown, reddish brown and purplish black; markings mostly confined to larger end. One measured 17 x 12.7 mm. **Incubation.** On two occasions we observed both adults near nest with eggs but only duller female seen to incubate. As hatching virtually synchronous, it is almost certain that incubation commenced after laying of final egg. Period unknown. **Nestling.** At hatching altricial and downy. Skin flesh pink. Pale grey down sparse and rather long; on head, upperparts, upperwing and thighs. Mouth and tongue pink, the latter with pale pink rear spurs. Gape flanges yellow. Feathered young generally resemble adults, but with less distinctive markings. Bill grey (as in adult) but legs and feet flesh-pink (dark in adults). **Care of young.** Both adults present at nests containing young but we did not observe young being fed. Fledging period unknown. However, given appearance of eight-day-old nestlings and experience with similar nestlings, we suggest duration is 13–14 days. Faeces not removed by adults once nestlings were c. 6–7 days old; consequently there is a considerable accumulation around the nest rim by fledging. This is consistent with other finches (Harrison & Castell 1998). **Season.** Our limited observations suggest that eggs are laid in May. Everett (1987) reports singing and young being fed by adults in November, and song, paired birds and collection of nest material from 16 March into April. Jennings (1995) reports nest-building in March, eggs May, recently fledged young March–July (and November), and an adult with a brood patch in July. This implies two broods, with first eggs in March and another clutch in May. Probable double brooding is consistent with Western Palearctic *Serinus* (Harrison & Castell 1998).

Yemen Linnet *Carduelis yemenensis*

Endemic to highlands of south-west Arabia, breeding on vegetated hillsides, especially with juniper, and in gardens and cultivated areas (Jennings 1995, Porter *et al.* 1996). On 8–9 June and 13–14 June, at Raydah Escarpment Nature Reserve, near Abha, we found 12 occupied nests and several empty nests. All were in juniper (the dominant tree species) near the top of the escarpment.

Nest site. Most were c. 2 m above ground, but range was 1.5–4.0 metres; majority in outer branches, some against main trunk. **Nest.** A cup, 8 cm in diameter, with inner cup of 4.5 cm, constructed of small twigs, grass, rootlets, lichen and spider webs, sometimes screened on one side by hanging lichen, attached to nest's outer edge. Lining consists of plant down, hair and fine grasses. **Nest-building.** We observed a female constructing one nest, but did not see the male, whose role is unknown. **Eggs.** Typical clutch size four (3–4). Sub-elliptical, smooth and glossy. Dull white or very pale blue, with fine, pale brown and reddish-brown spots and streaks, mainly concentrated at larger end. Two eggs in same nest 17.1 x 12.6 mm and 16.1 x 11.9 mm. **Incubation.** Eggs laid at daily intervals and incubation commenced on completion of clutch. Females observed incubating, but not males; the latter's role is unknown. Incubation period unknown. **Nestling.** Altricial and downy. Skin flesh-pink at hatching, becoming reddish pink within a few days. Down grey and long; on head,

upperparts, wings and sides. Mouth bright crimson-pink, paler when recently hatched. Tongue pink, with prominent pale pink rear spurs. Gape flanges yellow. At fledging, bill brownish yellow, and legs and feet greyish pink. **Care of young.** Respective role of adults unknown. Considerable accumulations of droppings around rim of those nests containing larger young. Fledging period unknown. **Season.** Eggs and young previously found in March–July, but adults also observed feeding fledged young in October (Bowden & Brooks 1987, Jennings 1995). Probably double brooded.

DISCUSSION

Considerable gaps in our knowledge of the breeding biology of the birds of Arabia exist. Nestlings of 42 species are undescribed (or inadequately so), the eggs of six are undescribed and basic details, such as incubation and fledging periods, the role of the sexes in nest-building, incubation and care of young, are unknown for many others. In the most extreme examples—Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*, Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus*, Yemen Serin *Serinus menachensis* and Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhyncostruthus socotranus*—almost nothing is known of breeding biology. Further gaps exist for several Afrotropical species, where basic details are known from studies in Africa, but no similar work has been undertaken in Arabia, where many aspects, e.g. clutch size, may significantly differ. Quite clearly, much research is required on the breeding biology of Arabian birds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Prof. A. Abuzinada, of the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development, Riyadh, for granting permission to and supporting our work; Mike Jennings for advice, particularly on breeding seasons, prior to our visit; Patrick Paillat and Dr Mohammed Shobrak, of the National Wildlife Research Centre, near Taif, for advice and assistance during our stay; and Abdulrahman Khoja, also of the latter organisation, who accompanied us during most of our field work, arranged accommodation and provided general assistance.

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Peter Castell, 19 Berry Drive, Great Sutton, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH66 4JJ, U. K.
Jeffory Coburn, 6 Ladwell Close, Wash Common, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 6PJ, U. K.
Bernard Pleasance, Windhover, Wattisfield Road, Thelnetham, near Diss, Norfolk IP22 1NN, U. K.
Steven Williams, 24 Browning Drive, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH65 7BW, U. K.

Departure and arrival of Common Swift *Apus apus* in Tel Aviv, Israel, in 1999–2000

ULRICH TIGGES

UNLIKE MUCH OF EUROPE, there are few precise data available for the arrival and departure of Common Swift *Apus apus* in the Middle East. Paz (1997) presents information in months and Shirihai (1996) in weeks for both arrival and departure in Israel.

In 1999, I observed the species' departure from Tel Aviv. While the skies were crowded with these birds until 7 June, they were empty from 8 June onwards. Only singles were seen thereafter.

In 2000, the first individuals appeared on 11 February. Up to around 23 February they were observed as individuals or in small groups. The majority arrived on 27–29 February. On 24 February, one was seen entering a hole, without any hesitation, as if this was its nest site and it was familiar with its situation. On 29 February, I heard a duet between a male and female from another hole, clearly identifying them as a breeding pair (Kaiser 1997). In Ramat Aviv, where I closely observed several nesting sites, I recorded the first egg on 19 March. These observations demonstrate that the species' arrival and subsequent behaviour in Israel follows the same pattern as in central Europe. Though it is unknown whether they are breeding birds, singles are observed c. 10–12 days before the arrival of breeders. The vanguard appear approximately four days before the main body of breeders. Breeding birds occupy the nesting sites immediately and within approximately three weeks commence egg-laying. Based on my observations it can be calculated that breeders remain in Tel Aviv as long as in central Europe, e.g. in Berlin, where the median stay is c. 96 days (Voigt 1994).

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Ulrich Tigges, Erlanger Straße 11, 12053 Berlin, Germany.

Prostrate desert gourd plants as apparent cooling sites for larks in heat of day

P. J. COWAN AND G. M. BROWN

BIRDS IN HOT ENVIRONMENTS thermoregulate by physiological and behavioural means, to prevent body temperature reaching the upper lethal limit of 46–47°C (e.g. Maclean 1996). A behavioural response of birds to intense solar radiation

and high ambient air temperature is to enter shade (e.g. Thomas 1984), including burrows (Williams *et al.* 1999). However, Shobrak (1998) observed Hoopoe Larks *Alaemon alaudipes* apparently cooling by lying on mat-like *Corchorus depressus* (Tiliaceae) plants in west-central Saudi Arabia. He suggested that the larks are pressing their bodies against relatively cool, damp foliage.

In Kuwait, PJC has watched Dunn's *Eremalauda dunni*, Bar-tailed Desert *Ammomanes cincturus*, Hoopoe and Temminck's Horned Larks *Eremophila bilopha* sitting on *Citrullus colocynthis* (Cucurbitaceae) gourd plants in the heat of the day during summer, when air temperatures measured in a standard weather screen can reach 50°C. These plants are green and grow in mat form on the desert surface. Indeed, finding and scanning *C. colocynthis* plants during the hotter part of the day can be a productive technique in summer for locating these larks. When a lark is located it usually permits close vehicular approach, remaining on the plant. Several larks may occupy the same plant. Unlike Shobrak's (1998) larks, which prostrated themselves on *Corchorus* for only a few seconds at a time, the larks on *Citrullus* give the impression they remain on the plant for quite long periods.

Citrullus colocynthis is a plant with deeply penetrating roots that reach the water table. It survives during high temperatures by 'spending water' i.e. the leaf stomata open wider and transpirational cooling increases rapidly (Althawadi & Grace 1986). *C. colocynthis* leaf temperatures up to 15.3°C cooler than ambient air have been recorded in the Sahara. The leaf temperatures did not exceed 41°C, despite soil temperatures of up to 70°C and ambient air temperatures occasionally reaching 54°C (Lange 1959).

Larks sitting on *Corchorus* and *Citrullus* are exposed to the sun. Their thermal status and rate of water loss compared to larks using burrows, or in the shade of rocks or shrubs (Williams *et al.* 1999), require investigation. *Citrullus colocynthis* is a widespread perennial in the Saharo-Sindian desert (e.g. Bhandari 1995, Boulos 1983, Migahid 1988). Such lark behaviour may also be widespread.

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P. J. Cowan, Aridland Agriculture Department, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, P. O. Box 24885, Safat 13109, Kuwait.

G. M. Brown, Abteilung Allgemeine und Spezielle Botanik, Fachbereich Biologie, Universität Rostock, Wismarsche Str. 8, 18051 Rostock, Germany.

The first Dunnock *Prunella modularis* in Kuwait

MIKE REED AND TONY CROSS

IN THE EARLY MORNING OF 11 November 1991, while MR and TC were undertaking wader and passerine ringing at Messila Pools, on the southern outskirts of Kuwait City, we trapped a juvenile Dunnock *Prunella modularis*. TC had previously heard a call, recognisable as this species, but we had been informed by Mahmoud Shehab that Dunnock did not occur in Kuwait. This was confirmed by the literature (namely Cramp 1988, Hollom *et al.* 1988, Peterson *et al.* 1983 and Svensson 1984) available to MR and TC. It was processed and, before release into nearby cover, the brief description below and a series of photographs (Plate 1) were taken. Upon release it flew a short distance into a small clump of tall vegetation close to the ringing station.

Description. An insignificant small brown bird. Slim build with dark grey-brown plumage, streaked brown-black on upperparts. Head, neck and underparts slate blue-grey with brownish crown and ear-coverts. Thin, pointed dark bill. Biometrics taken during processing, by TC at 07.00, were wing length (flattened and straightened chord) 67 mm and weight 16.3 g. It was aged as a first-year by eye colour, which was dull muddy brown.

Following release, it was not seen again that day, although on a subsequent visit to the area, on the morning of 21 November 1991, it was re-located in the same clump of vegetation where it had been released. Details of the record have been submitted to both the Kuwait Ornithological Society Records Committee and the Ornithological Society of Kuwait Records Committee. The second and third records of this species in Kuwait were made during mist-netting operations by Nigel Cleere and David Kelly at Jahra Pools, 28 km west of Kuwait City, in October–December 1995 (*Sandgrouse* 18 (1): 79 and *Birding World* 8: 451).

Plate 1. Dunnock *Prunella modularis*, Messila Pools, Kuwait, 11 November 1991. (*Tony Cross*)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The record was made while MR and TC were studying environmental effects of the Gulf War, and subsequent oil-well fires and oiling, on the Kuwaiti avifauna, on 3–24 November 1991. The work was funded by BirdLife International (then the International Council for Bird Preservation) and the Environmental Protection Council of Kuwait. The survey was coordinated by Charles Pilcher in Kuwait and Mike Evans for BirdLife International. Mahmoud Shehab and Walid Abdulaziz are thanked for their support and assistance.

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Mike Reed, 21 Hardings, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire AL7 2EQ, U. K. (Corresponding author)
Tony Cross, Welsh Kite Trust, The Stable Cottage, Doldowlod, Llandrindod Wells, Powys LD1 6HG, U. K.

The first Black Bush Robin *Cercotrichas podobe* in Egypt

SHERIF M. BAHA EL DIN AND MINDY BAHA EL DIN

BLACK BUSH ROBIN *Cercotrichas podobe* was excluded by Goodman & Meininger (1989) from the Egyptian avifaunal list. They rejected a claim of one observed, on 29 January 1896 by Cholmley (1897), near Gebel Elba in the south-east Eastern Desert, for lack of details. There are also two recent reports from Egypt, lacking documentation or details, in Miles (1998), both in south Sinai, singles at Nuweiba, in 1993, and at Naama Bay, on 31 January 1997.

On 3 November 2000, SMBD observed and photographed a Black Bush Robin (Plate 1) at Gebel Elba, representing the first substantiated record of the species in Egypt. Gebel Elba (1435 metres), a montane outcrop on the Red Sea coast, is part of the mountain chain that runs nearly continuously along the Red Sea from Djibouti to Suez. It is situated within the Elba Protected Area and located immediately north of the political boundary with Sudan. Gebel Elba supports a relatively rich biodiversity unparalleled among terrestrial environments within Egypt. A number of Afrotropical elements reach their northern limits at Elba, including several bird species, e.g. Shining Sunbird *Nectarinia habessinica* and Rosy-patched Shrike *Rhodophoneus cruentus*.

The Black Bush Robin was found in dense *Acacia* woodland within Wadi Aideib, at an altitude of c. 300 metres, on the north-east slope of Gebel Elba. SMBD had previous experience with *C. podobe* and immediately recognised it as this species. It was observed for approximately five minutes, hopping on small boulders, skulking in low vegetation and in flight. General structure was similar to Rufous Bush Robin *C. galactotes*, but it had a distinctly longer tail. A rather poor photograph was obtained (Plate 1), but is easily recognisable as an adult, being sooty black in coloration, with rusty inner webs to the primaries obvious in flight. The tail was held erect, giving prominence to the white tips to the undertail-coverts and outertail feathers.

Plate 1. Black Bush Robin *Cercotrichas podobe*, Wadi Aideib, Gebel Elba, 3 November 2000. (*Sherif M. Baha el Din*)

Black Bush Robin is largely confined, in Africa, to the Sahel, breeding in a band across the continent from Senegal and Mauritania east to the Red Sea coast (Snow & Perrins 1998). According to Nikolaus (1987), it is locally common in Sudan in arid rocky hills and is a breeding resident in the Red Sea Mountains, where it is reported to nest between May and July (Snow & Perrins 1998). The species inhabits arid regions in Africa, such as savanna and thorn-scrub of scattered *Acacia*, or clumps of tamarisks, gardens and hedges, to at least 1500 metres, as well as in hot arid semi-desert and wadis with thickets (Snow & Perrins 1998).

The species also occurs in montane regions east of the Red Sea, being reported as a breeding resident in south-west Arabia, from Yemen north to the Ha'il region of Saudi Arabia (Snow & Perrins 1998). It has also been regularly recorded in Israel since 1981, where Shirihai (1996) considered the species an 'occasional to extremely rare local spring and summer visitor between March and July and apparently casual breeder in southern Arava'.

While the species is largely resident, it appears to be subject to seasonal movements. According to Snow & Perrins (1998), it is prone to some altitudinal and north–south movement in winter. Furthermore, the species is reported to be expanding north in Arabia as a result of land-use changes associated with desert reclamation (Shirihai 1996, Snow & Perrins 1998).

The occurrence of Black Bush Robin in Egypt is unsurprising, as it is known from the Red Sea mountains immediately south of the border with Sudan and at Eilat, Israel. It is difficult to speculate about the status of the species at Elba, as ornithological coverage of this region is relatively limited. The record lends support to the previous

claim by Cholmley (1897), and it is possible that the species has been overlooked since. It is potentially a breeding resident or migrant breeder at Elba, especially as the species breeds in the Red Sea mountains to the south.

The habitat at Gebel Elba is similar to other habitats where the species is known to reside. Elba enjoys a higher precipitation than any other mountains in the region, mostly in the form of orographic moisture. This permits a diverse flora to exist: ferns, mosses and succulents are relatively common at higher altitudes, while at lower levels in the wadis and foothills, there is dense *Acacia* woodland in parts (Baha el Din 1999). Vegetation is particularly rich in the north and north-east, seaward-facing, slopes that receive moisture-laden winds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge Gabriel Mikhail, Omar Attum and Mohammed Gad who participated in the trip to the Elba Protected Area. Dr Moustafa Fouda, Director, Nature Conservation Sector, Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) facilitated the visit.

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Sherif M. Baha el Din and Mindy Baha El Din, 3 Abdalla El Katib St., Apt. 3, Dokki, Cairo, Egypt.

Notes on the breeding biology of Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax*

PETER CASTELL

HERE I PRESENT new information on breeding, particularly on nestlings, incubation and fledging periods, of Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax*. In late April–early May 1999 PC found six occupied nests containing eggs and young, and observed fledglings out of the nest. David Whaley, who is resident in Cyprus, subsequently visited two of these nests at regular intervals in order to establish incubation and fledging periods (previously unknown; Flint & Stewart 1992), and the roles of the adults.

Incubation

At one nest, eggs were laid at daily intervals in the early morning; incubation commenced with the final egg and occupied 12–13 days. The female was observed incubating on seven visits, the male only once. At another nest the male was seen incubating once (female four times), but the female was incubating only 20 minutes later. Is it possible that males incubate or perhaps merely cover eggs for only short periods, possibly only while females are feeding?

Nestlings

Previously undescribed. Upon hatching, the skin is mainly reddish pink, blackish grey on head, nape, wings and spine, and grey on lower back; the lower tarsus and feet are orange-pink. Skin colour darkens during the first two days. The gape is orange-yellow, with two black elongated markings, one at either side of the base of the tongue; a narrow line extends from the inside tip of each marking and these almost converge towards the tongue tip. Gape flanges are pale yellow. While mouth markings in *Sylvia* differ between species, those of Cyprus Warbler are largely consistent with congenerics in the Western Palearctic (Harrison & Castell 1998).

Hatching, brooding and tending of the young

Hatching was synchronous in two nests. Females were observed brooding young on eight occasions, never males. Both sexes feed the young, both in the nest and after fledging (but see 'Number of broods').

Plate 1. Nest of Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* containing five eggs. (*Peter Castell*)

Plate 2. Nestlings of Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* aged two days. (*Peter Castell*)

Plate 3. Fledgling Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* aged c. 10–11 days. (*Peter Castell*)

Fledging period
It was possible to establish the fledging period at one nest. The chicks hatched on 3 May and, at 09.00 on 12 May, the adults were feeding young 10–30 metres away. The three young were unable to fly properly. Nine days is a very short fledging period among *Sylvia*, 10–12 days being more typical (Harrison & Castell 1998).

Number of broods
It is probable that the species is, at least occasionally, double brooded, but proof is lacking. On 28–29 April, within a large area of suitable habitat of low dense scrub, PC watched two separate lone males feeding fledged young. The young could fly well and had evidently been out of the nest for a minimum of seven days. In many other double-brooded species, females incubate the second clutch of eggs while males feed fledged young from the first brood.

Fledglings
Brown on the head, wings and upperparts, buffish-brown below and whitish on the throat. The tail is brown with whitish-buff outer tail feathers. Bill is black. Legs and feet are reddish brown or orange-brown.

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Peter Castell, 19 Berry Drive, Great Sutton, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH66 4JJ, U. K..

Breeding Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* in the Samarian Hills and Judean Desert, Israel

PHILIP GRIFFIN, ASAF MAYROSE AND IDO TSURIM

IN ISRAEL, PALE ROCK SPARROW *Carpospiza brachydactyla* is a scarce local breeder at 1250–1600 metres, on the slopes of Mount Hermon (Shirihai 1996). Published records suggest that no more than ten pairs breed on Hermon, mainly in late May–early July, and that nesting is sporadic (Zaterman 1986, Shirihai 1996). It was an occasional breeder in the Jordan Valley in the early 20th century (Shirihai 1996). Migrants move through the east of the country, with largest numbers in the Eilat area. Fluctuations in the species' abundance occur both on migration and the nesting grounds, and it is thought to be an opportunistic breeder, following exceptional rains (Cramp 1994).

In late March 1988, large numbers were seen in the Negev and Judean Deserts and Arava and Jordan Valleys, and though singing and displaying were observed, breeding was not recorded (Shirihai 1996). Following similarly impressive numbers in spring 2000 (though absent from the central Negev), many were found singing in the

hills of eastern Samaria and the Judean Desert in late April. It should be noted that in winter 1999–2000, Israel received only c. 80% of its mean rainfall, though there was exceptional snow cover on hills above 400 metres on 27 January. Furthermore, while December and February–May were considerably drier than usual, January received c. 300% of its mean monthly rainfall. On 3 May, in eastern Samaria, AM and PG observed a pair copulating near Ma'ale Mikhmas (31°53'N 35°19'E). On 1 June, the same observers discovered many individuals carrying insect food near Kokhav ha-Shakhar (31°58'N 35°21'E), also in eastern Samaria. On the same day, they located a nest within a low bush (c. 30 cm above ground) containing four downy chicks, which were being fed by an adult. On 4 June, in the Judean Desert, IT and Itai Shani observed a pair feeding one fledgling at Har Amasa (31°20'N 35°06'E). These are apparently the first breeding records in Israel in recent decades away from Mount Hermon. That from Har Amasa is the southernmost breeding record in Israel, being 230 km south of Mount Hermon.

Pale Rock Sparrow was commonly observed in the Judea-Samaria area until late June, with presumed post-breeding concentrations of several tens, e.g. two flocks of 30, in the northern Judean desert, west of Metsokei Dragot, at 31°36'N 35°20'E, on 17 June 2000, and at 31°35'N 35°20'E, on 16 July 2000 (Yoav Perlman pers. comm.). Extrapolating the tens seen in the survey area and the considerable area of similar habitat nearby (presumably suitable for breeding), we suggest that several hundred pairs may have bred in spring 2000 in east Israel.

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Philip Griffin, 3 Evershed Street, Myaree, 6154, Western Australia, Australia.
Asaf Mayrose, 18 Tarshish St, Ramat-Hasharon 47445, Israel.
Ido Tsurim, Department of Life Sciences, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, P. O. Box 653, Be'er Sheva, 84105, Israel.

The first Indian Silverbill *Euodice malabarica* in Egypt

TOMMY PEDERSEN

BETWEEN 15.30 and 16.45 hours on 3 December 2000, O. B. Hansen and myself were birding at the sewage ponds a few kilometres south-west of Naama Bay, in south Sinai, Egypt, at c. 27°53'N 34°19'E. Immediately to the east of the ponds is a small grove of trees. In a c. 1 metre-tall dry bush, between the ponds and the trees, were two Indian Silverbill *Euodice malabraica*, at approximately 5–7 metres distance from us. They were not shy and were later seen flying towards the reeds surrounding the sewage ponds. We noted the following

Description. Size of a European Serin *Serinus serinus*. Upperparts: pale brown head, wings and back with a strikingly white rump and black tail. Underparts: greyish throat and belly. Bill grey,

short and deep based. Both were probably adults, as the rump was clean white, with no indication of any brownish coloration. No calls were heard. African Silverbill *Lonchura cantans* is rather similar in appearance, but could be eliminated on account of that species' brownish-black rump.

Indian Silverbill is an Asian species, distributed from south Arabia east through the Indian subcontinent to central Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (Snow & Perrins 1998). It has bred in Israel since 1988–89, with at least ten pairs breeding in Eilat in 1990, and individuals of captive origin have also been recorded in Cyprus, Jordan (breeding recorded) and Kuwait (Snow & Perrins 1998, Svensson *et al.* 1999). Naama Bay is relatively close to both Eilat and Aqaba, which can be considered a probable source for the birds observed in south Sinai. The species has not previously been reported in Egypt (Goodman & Meininger 1989).

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Tommy Pedersen, Havreveien 28, N-0680 Oslo, Norway.

The breeding ecology of Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus* in Jordan

DR FARES KHOURY

THE BREEDING RANGE OF SYRIAN SERIN *Serinus syriacus* is restricted to the montane Near East. In Jordan it breeds only in Dana Nature Reserve. This apparently isolated population has been the recent subject of extensive research (Khoury 1998a, 2000, in press). The species' breeding biology has hardly been studied, although some published data are available from Mt. Hermon (Shirihai 1996). A comparison of the breeding biology of different populations is important in the understanding of population dynamics under a variety of environmental conditions. The results of such studies are also of particular significance for planning and implementing conservation action. This report summarises preliminary observations, made in 1996–1997, on the breeding ecology of *S. syriacus* in Jordan.

Table 1. Breeding biology of Syrian Serin *Serinus syriacus* in south-west Jordan.

Breeding season	mid-March–early July
First observed nest-building (one brood)	April
Start of nest-building (perhaps late brood)	mid-May
Clutch size	4–5 (mean: 4.1, n=8)
Incubation period	13–14 days (n=5)
Fledging of young after:	14 days (n=1)
Last fledging observed in population	late June

Two principal differences in the breeding biology between the populations of south-west Jordan and Mt. Hermon are observable.

1. In south-west Jordan, the breeding season commences one month earlier than at Mt. Hermon (Shirihai 1996). Two factors play an important role in start date: an early rise in temperature at the end of the rainy season in the breeding areas of south-west Jordan produces a rapid development of annuals, especially *Erodium*, *Erophila* and, in some years, *Senecio* (Khoury in press). Annual variations do exist, however, and may cause a shift in the breeding season of up to ten days. The second factor is related to migration patterns: in contrast to northern populations of Syrian Serin, most of the south-west Jordan population is resident. This permits individuals to occupy breeding areas and commence breeding as soon as the climate and food resources in this range become suitable.

2. Most Syrian Serin pairs in south-west Jordan breed once per year. Late broods, which may have been second broods, are very unusual. The lack of pairs with second broods appears related to a rapid decrease in food resources within the breeding areas during the summer.

In south-west Jordan the species becomes increasingly dependent on the fresh seeds of fruiting perennial plants, as annuals dry out, during the summer. Perennials were present only at low densities within the breeding areas, owing to intensive grazing during winter (Khoury 2000, in press). The species was, therefore, forced to forage in neighbouring areas. Greater distances between feeding sites and nests probably leads to a decrease in feeding frequency of the young and consequently to low breeding success, at high energetic costs. The drying out of remnant pools in the breeding areas during the summer may have an additional negative affect on breeding.

At Mt. Hermon the species ascends to higher altitudes to raise a second brood during summer (Shirihai 1996). In the highlands of south-west Jordan, habitat zonation is different and no suitable breeding areas exist at higher altitudes, perhaps making multiple broods impossible. The highland plateau of south-west Jordan is devoid of shrub and tree stands (suitable nesting sites); such areas are nevertheless utilised by feeding serins in the post-breeding season (Khoury 1998b, in press).

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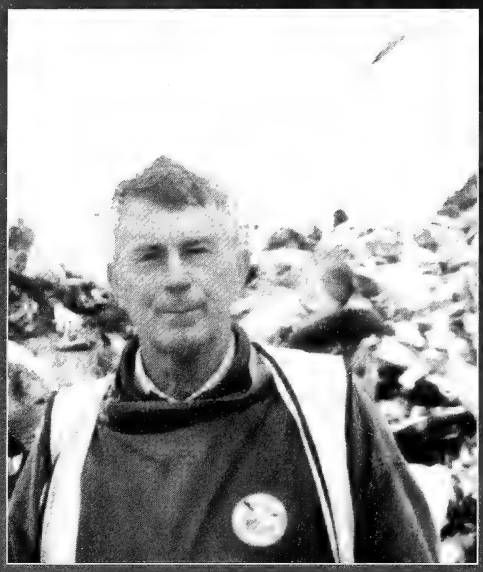
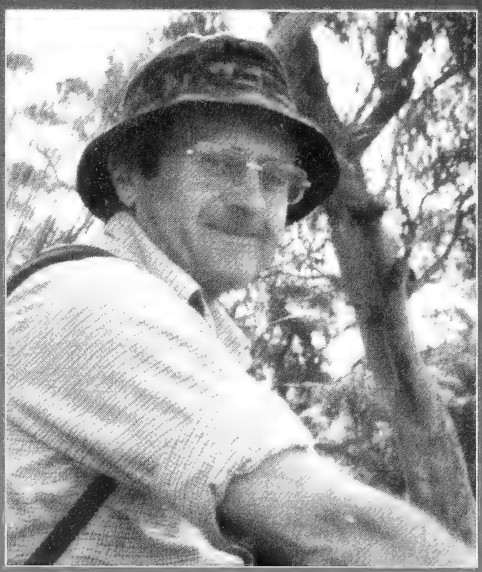
Dr Fares Khoury, Department of Biological Sciences, Hashemite University, P. O. Box 150459, Zarqa 13115, Jordan.

PROFILE



Peter Stewart & Peter Flint



The two Peters are inextricably linked with Cyprus and have jointly exerted a huge influence on its ornithology during the last 30–40 years. Both are Life Members of the Cyprus Ornithological Society (COS) and members of its rarities committee, have written numerous papers on Cyprus birds and were country correspondents for *The birds of the Western Palearctic*, as well as its subsequent concise edition. Though both left Cyprus in the early 1970s and have met only infrequently since, their joint endeavours culminated in the B.O.U. Checklist of *The birds of Cyprus* (1983). Extensively revised and enlarged in 1992, it is a definitive reference. Both keenly acknowledge the editorial help of Karen Flint, whose suggestions, accuracy and attention to detail greatly improved the manuscript.

Peter Stewart was COS Secretary in 1961 and 1967–69, and Ringing Officer 1967–69. With Steen Christensen, he published the *Checklist of the Birds of Cyprus* (1971), the first detailed and reliable modern work on Cyprus birds. He has travelled extensively, being involved in ringing activities in Singapore, Malaysia and Borneo, but now devotes himself to the Severn Estuary Gull Group. He describes himself as a gull fanatic, is editor and producer of the Severn Estuary Group reports, and colour-ring coordinator for the group. He is presently preparing a paper on primary moult in Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*.

Interested in wildlife from childhood, Peter Flint only began to watch birds in his mid-twenties. In 1969, he was posted to Cyprus where he met PS. When he asked PS to take him as a trainee ringer, he was immediately presented with a box of very tatty and faded skins, and asked to identify plumages! On retirement PF returned to Cyprus, where he helps raise funds for the North Cyprus Society for the Protection of Birds and Nature, maintains the North Cyprus Birds' website, has established a new ringing scheme, and produced two bird reports.

Like others before them, the two Peters illustrate well how a hobby can become an all-absorbing interest, and how that interest can be productive of much definitive study. They have seen Cyprus birding develop from the casual enthusiasm of, largely, visiting expatriates, to a professionally organised study, increasingly run by Cypriots living in both parts of the island.

Derek Harvey

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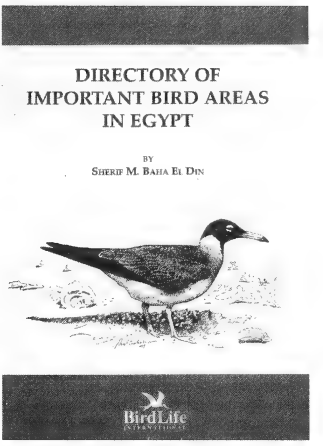

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REVIEWS & Recent Literature

Doherty, P. (2000) *Waders: a video guide to the key waders of Europe, Asia and North America*. A Bird Images video guide narrated by Bill Oddie. VHS video. Three hours and 30 minutes, £24.95. Available from Bird Images, 28 Carousel Walk, Sherburn-in-Elmet, North Yorkshire LS25 6LP, U. K.

Waders are one of the most popular groups of birds and this two-video set covers 103 species that occur in Europe, Asia and North America. Volume one comprises oystercatchers to *Calidris* sandpipers, while the second covers Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* to phalaropes. Broadly speaking it covers most Holarctic species. Each genus is introduced by a short discussion of its general characteristics, while each species is accorded 48 seconds (Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*) to just over four minutes (Greater *Tringa melanoleuca* and Lesser Yellowlegs *T. flavipes*) coverage. Most is of excellent quality with few shaky or slightly blurred images. Most distinct plumages are depicted. I particularly enjoyed the displaying Rock Sandpiper *Calidris ptilocnemis* and exquisite breeding-plumaged American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* and Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*. Where no suitable video was available, stills have been used to cover missing plumages, and Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* is covered using only stills. A most useful feature is the inclusion of plumage, location and date information with each new piece of footage.

The commentary, by Bill Oddie, is, as one would expect, clear, lively and interesting. For each species, it covers topics such as range, proven and potential vagrancy, habitat preferences, sexing, ageing and, of course, identification. Most of the important features for each species are explained well and in some detail, using many up-to-date criteria, although without becoming too in-depth and complicated for the less experienced viewer to follow. The discussion of identification, ageing and sexing is accurate and largely error free. However, one absolute 'howler' is the inclusion of video of an adult Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* while discussing adult Piping Plover *C. melodus*.

Adequate use of arrows, still frames and split screen comparisons are made to assist the viewer in appreciating key differences between similar species. However, I felt there were several occasions where it could have benefitted from even greater use of such features. Comparison with other videos dealing with the identification of particular groups of species is perhaps inevitable. Although treating a much smaller number of species, recent videos covering North American gulls contain more in-depth coverage, which some waders, in particular the smaller *Calidris*, would have benefitted from. But, this guide will prove a useful reference and splendid viewing.

Chris Bradshaw

Harris, T. & Franklin, K. (2000) *Shrikes and bush-shrikes, including wood-shrikes, helmet-shrikes, flycatcher-shrikes, batises and wattle-eyes*. A. & C. Black, London. pp 392, 41 colour plates, 114 colour distribution maps and many line drawings. £35.

Just three years ago we were treated to a similar volume in the rival Pica Press series (see *Sandgrouse* 20: 68–69); now we have this new work from Tony Harris, illustrated by Kim Franklin, which not only treats the true shrikes but also a diverse assemblage of, principally Afrotropical, related species. For me this rival volume matches and builds impressively upon the earlier book. Harris' vast body of personal research is immediately apparent, while the closely referenced text (which, I suspect, will not cater to the tastes of all his readers and has not been a feature of many previous volumes in either series) appeals to my personal wants from such a book.

The comparatively long introductory section, which includes a detailed overview of shrike relationships, taxonomy and acoustic communication, and 11-page pair of appendices discussing problems in defining species limits among the *Laniidae* and *Malaconotidae*, and comparative characters of all genera under review, are novel but highly welcome features. In sharp contrast to many other recent monographs, one immediately senses that one is in the presence of an author with a genuine knowledge and 'feel' for his subject, rather than an ornithological 'hack'. My only, very minor, gripe concerns reference presentation: all, including many personal communications and unpublished notes (which offer additional testimony to the author's meticulousness), are accorded a superscript number in the text. These are listed sequentially at the rear of the book, but for published sources one then has to turn to the conventional bibliography to discover the full details. Given the quality of the plates, which are of similar standard to those by Worfolk in the earlier work, the improved quality of the maps (although they still do not reach the Pica benchmark), and in-depth treatment of all species in the text, I have no hesitation in recommending this book, despite the availability of the Pica Press guide and the relevant volume of *The birds of Africa*. Great book, superb birds.

Guy M. Kirwan

Zalles, J. I. & Bildstein, K. L. (eds.) (2000) *Raptor watch. A global directory of raptor migration sites.* BirdLife International, Cambridge, U.K. & Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Pennsylvania. pp 419, several maps, tables and black-and-white photographs. Available from: Natural History Book Service Ltd., 2–3 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon TQ9 5XN, UK. E-mail: nhbs@nhbs.co.uk, £37.00 plus postage and packing.

This is another BirdLife International publication of strong conservation importance. It provides an overview of the world's major raptor migration sites, while the list of chapters illustrates the in-depth analysis and well-written work of Zalles and Bildstein: 'Raptor migration as conservation opportunity', 'Global analysis', 'Regional introductions' (subdivided by continent and discussing biogeography, migration, threats and conservation), and many subchapters under the heading 'Country and watchsite description', which form the bulk of the book and cover over 100 countries.

As the book's title suggests this is a 'global directory', and thus covers, very concisely, each site's description. If one seeks further information on annual totals, seasonal migration timing, e.g. periods/waves and route behaviour (including daily and seasonal shift of passage front or flight performance), population trends as evidenced by counts (and comparison with data from the breeding/winter grounds), or other details, one must refer to additional, more specific publications relating to the region, country or species. Nevertheless, this impressive book provides an easy reference to published material containing such information.

Some maps and black-and-white landscape photographs of the sites, along with many tables and lists, add to the work's attractive and easy-to-use format, but it is, above all, a highly scientific publication. Recommended to all ornithologist and bodies dealing with the conservation management of raptors throughout the world, this book builds on several regional raptor migration publications (although more are needed) that summarise, in greater detail, the available information. Finally, it is important to enhance calls for urgent conservation action in defence of migrant raptors, as many are still slaughtered en route, or their numbers have been considerably reduced due to a loss of breeding and wintering habitats, e.g. Steppe *Aquila nipalensis* and Lesser Spotted Eagles *A. pomarina*, counts of which on migration in the Middle East suggest a rapid decline within the last 10–20 years. This important book demonstrates why, at present, counts on migration routes are probably the only effective method to monitor population trends of migrant raptors, especially of more widespread species. It is recommended to anyone with a regional or global interest in raptor migration and conservation.

Hadoram Shirihai

ALSO RECEIVED

Kasparek, M. & Kinzelbach, R. (eds.) (2000) *Zoology in the Middle East* Volume 20. Kasparek Verlag, Heidelberg. pp 144, DM37.

Volume 20 contains a single paper on birds, devoted to DNA-based sexual identification of falcons, and its application in wild studies and captive-breeding programmes. Other papers cover seven other classes.

Kasparek, M. & Kinzelbach, R. (eds.) (2000) *Zoology in the Middle East* Volume 21. Kasparek Verlag, Heidelberg. pp 168, DM37.

No avian papers are included in the latest issue, but mammals, reptiles, amphibians and a variety of other classes are covered in a total of 17 papers.

RECENT LITERATURE

Compiled by Guy M. Kirwan & Effie Warr

This review, which is produced annually, principally covers papers published in the West European literature considered to be most relevant to birders resident in the region. All were published in 2000 unless otherwise stated.

Regional

Bakker, T. *et al.* Caspian Gull identification gallery. *Birding World* 13: 60–74.

Bradshaw, C. Identification of autumn Isabelline Wheatears. *Brit. Birds* 93: 488–492.

Corso, A. Identification of European Lanner. *Birding World* 13: 200–213.

Hinsley, S. & Ferns, P. Juvenile plumage of European sandgrouse. *Brit. Birds* 93: 91–93.

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Around the Region

compiled by
Guy M. Kirwan

Records in *Around the Region* are published for interest only; their inclusion does not imply acceptance by the records committee of the relevant country. Some records have been authenticated, including all those from Oman, and these are usually indicated. All records refer to 2000 unless otherwise stated.

Records and photographs for *Sandgrouse* 23 (2) should be sent, by 15 July, to Around the Region, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, U.K.; or aroundthe region@osme.org

Bee-eaters
Merops apiaster
by D. Powell

Two **Red-throated Diver** *Gavia stellata* were off Iğneada, Thrace, on 3 February 2001. Following attempted nesting in 1999, **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* can be added to the list of Arabian breeding birds when a pair raised two young at Dhahran, Saudi Arabia in summer 2000 (Lobley 2000). Up to three individuals were present at Damman, also in Eastern Province, on 21 April–21 July. The first nesting of **Black-necked Grebe** *P. nigricollis* in UAE was noted in July (Abdi & Drew 2000); and over 10,000 were at Ercek Gölü, Turkey, on 9 September. The highest ever winter numbers of **Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus* in Israel involved a total of nine off the Mediterranean coast, on 4 February 2001, when there were also 13 **Leach's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* off Tel-Aviv, with an additional two of the latter off Jaffa, on 21 February 2001. In Oman, there was a **Swinhoe's Storm-petrel** *Oceanodroma monorhis* off Ras Al Khabbah, on 22 September, the ninth country record (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000). There were counts of 3258 **Pygmy Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* at Tudakul Lake, 30 km east of Bukhara, Uzbekistan, on 24 January, and 404 there, on 8 April. In Syria there was a **Shag** *P. aristotelis* on a small island at Ras al-Bassit, on 28 April. In Kazakhstan, there were 972 **White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* at Aydar Lake, on 6–7 April, and 114 **Dalmatian Pelican** *P. crispus* at Tudakul Lake, on 8 April, with the latter being confirmed to breeding at Sudochie Lake, in the Anu Darya River delta, Aral Sea, in June. Two pairs of **Striated Heron** *Butorides striatus* bred off Eilat in spring 2001, fledging three chicks; the first breeding in Israel was recorded at the same site in 1999. A **Yellow Bittern** *Ixobrychus sinensis*, only recently added to the list of birds recorded in the Middle East (Eriksen & Eriksen 1999) was photographed on Socotra, in November 1999 (*Phoenix* 17: 18) and up to three were still in Oman, at Salalah Khors, between 11 March and 25 September, but more exciting was the discovery of a **Cinnamon Bittern** *I. cinnamomeus* on Arzanah Island, on 20 November 2000, the first record in UAE and the Middle East region, if accepted. Both **Little Bittern** *I. minutus* and **Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* were found breeding at Jahra East Outfall, Kuwait, on 12 June. Thirty-three **Great White Egret** *Egretta alba* at Jahra Bay, on 24 November, was a new record count in Kuwait. **Goliath Heron** *Ardea goliath* rarely features in these reports but an adult was at Hamata mangrove, Egypt, on 21 September 1999 with two, including a

juvenile, there next day; this is a regular site for the species. Among interesting records recently accepted by the Oman Bird Records Committee, there was up to two **African Spoonbill** *Platalea alba* still at East Khawr (Dahariz), Salalah, until 10 March (from 1997) and a host of **Lesser Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus minor* at several sites in the south of country, between 1 February and 21 April, with the largest group being 41 at Khawr Mughsayl on 12 April; total numbers may have been significantly higher.

Two **Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor* at Eastern Lagoon, Abu Dhabi, on 15 October 2000, will be the third record in UAE, if accepted. In Egypt **White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons* has in recent years been a rare winter visitor; two were at Lake Qarun on 3–10 December 1999 at least and, in Israel, there was 26 in the Hula Valley, on 30 November. Three **Greylag Goose** *A. anser* were at Sulaibikhat Bay, Kuwait, on 24 November with one still present on 29–30 December. The first **Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiacus* in Sinai was at Narma Bay Sewage Farm, on 8 December 1999, and was still present on 27 March, while another, or the same, was at Sharm el Sheikh sewage farm, on 7 February 2001. Four **Lesser Whistling Duck** *Dendrocygna javanica* were still present at Khor Taqah, Salalah, on 15–16 March (*Phoenix* 17: 19; also see photo *Birding World* 13: 101). In UAE, a **Cotton Teal** *Nettapus coromandelianus* at Sharjah rubbish dump, on 28 December 2000, will be the sixth record, if accepted, while two **Marbled Teal** *Marmaronetta angustirostris* at Dubai sewage works, from 20 December until at least 18 January 2001 were the third record and the first for 25 years. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* was present at Damman Dome, Saudi Arabia, from 14 July with a maximum of 87 on 1 September being perhaps the largest ever count in Eastern Province. Thierry Bara has drawn my attention to an error in the recent Ramadan-Jaradi & Ramadan-Jaradi (1999) Lebanon checklist; the record of Goosander *Mergus merganser*, in March 1998, should refer to Red-breasted Merganser *M. serrator*, which would also be a first country record. Two female **Smew** *M. albellus* were at Moğan Gölü, just south of Ankara, Turkey, on 11 February 2001 at least; the species is only annual in the country. The status of the declining **White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala* population in Central Asia continues to attract attention; a summer 2000 survey of the Tengiz region of central Kazakhstan produced more than 3000 individuals in several areas, with a maximum count of 1500 at one site, while in Uzbekistan over 30 broods were noted at Sudochie Lake in July, and gatherings of pre-moulting males totalling 500–800 individuals were observed.

In UAE, additional reports to those published in *Sandgrouse* 22 (2) bring the national total of **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* records to 21, while, in Israel, there was a total of ten recorded during the Northern Valleys soaring bird migration survey, between late August and 20 September, with two more near Kfar Kasem, on 23 September. Photos of one of the spring 2000 individuals in Israel have recently been published (*Alula* 4: 167, *Birding World* 14: 34). A **Honey Buzzard** *P. apivorus* reported from Antiocha, in south-east Turkey, on 31 December, was extremely unseasonal, while on 25 January 2001, 400 **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* were discovered wintering around a slaughterhouse, near Gaziantep. The first confirmed breeding in Uzbekistan by **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* concerned a nest with a downy chick, near the Aral Sea, in April. Given the lack of recent reports in Israel, an immature **Lammergeier** *Gypaetus barbatus* at Gamla on 17 November, which was subsequently relocated nearby on 24 November and two days later at Shiffon, was a significant record. A juvenile **Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus* was found dead, near Umm Qasr, on 24 November; the species is less than annual in Kuwait. At least three **Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus* were reported in Israel during autumn/winter 2000/2001. Approximately the sixth **Bateleur** *Terathopius ecaudatus* in Israel was reported at Kfar Ruppin, on 23 October (*Birding World* 14: 29). **Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis* is a rare migrant in Israel, but one was at Shizzafon, on 7 November. Further south a **Tawny Eagle** *Aquila rapax* was again wintering around Urim, in the north-west Negev, Israel, from at least 17 December to 2 March 2001; it was presumably the individual last seen in late March 2000 (*Sandgrouse* 22: 157). **Verreaux's Eagle** *A. verreauxii* continues to stray on a relatively regular basis to the Eilat region, presumably from neighbouring Sinai; an adult was there on 5 November, with two next day. Two **Bonelli's Eagle** *Hieraaetus fasciatus* at Erzurum Ovası, on 25 October was a rare report from eastern Turkey. An unusual midwinter record was that of a **Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* at Sharm el Sheikh Sewage Farm, Sinai, on 8 December 1999, while a female **Merlin** *F. columbarius* at Damman, Saudi Arabia, on 7 December was a rare report in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province; another at Sun Farms, Sohar, Oman, on 23 January, was the fourth country record (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000). In September 1999, 185 pairs of **Sooty Falcon** *F. concolor* were breeding on Wadi Gimal island, in the Egyptian Red Sea, one of the largest known breeding concentrations in the country and approximately 2% of the known world breeding population. The report of a Sooty Falcon at Burdur Gölü, Turkey, on 29 October 1999 (*Sandgrouse* 22: 157) is erroneous and refers to an Eleonora's Falcon *F. eleonorae* (Bahtiyar Kurt *in litt.* 2000).

Four **Purple Gallinule** *Porphyrio porphyrio* in adult-like plumage were at Ma'ayan-Tsvi, north of Ma'agan-Mikhael, Israel, on 31 August, with one still present on 17 November; the species possibly breeds there. In UAE, there was a **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis pheonicurus* at the Emirates golf course, on 2 December; the 13th record, if accepted; that mentioned in the most recent of these reports (*Sandgrouse* 22: 157) was the 12th. Already accepted are the first Oman and Middle Eastern records of **Red-knobbed Coot** *Fulica cristata*, three at East Khor on 23 July to 10 November 1999 and another, or perhaps one of the same, again at East Khor, Salalah, on 3 September (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000). A **Common Crane** *Grus grus* was at Sulaibikhat Bay, Kuwait, on 30 December and a **Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo* at Sharm el Sheikh sewage farm, Sinai, on 7 February 2001, while another of the latter species, the eighth to be reported in UAE, was near Dubai sewage treatment plant, on 12 November. More remarkable must have been the sight of 10,881 of this magnificent species, at Aydar Lake, Uzbekistan, on 6–7 April. In Turkey, there was a female **Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax* in the Kızılırmak delta, on 26 November.

Interesting shorebird reports from UAE last autumn included two juvenile **Oriental Pratincole** *Glareola maldivarum* reported at Al Wathba camel track, on 25 August (fourth record if accepted) and a **Black-winged Pratincole** *G. nordmanni* at the same locality, on 6–12 October (the seventh record if accepted); 189 of the latter were at Van Gölü, Turkey, on 15 September. **Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* was confirmed to breed in Kuwait in late May; the first certain nesting attempt in Arabia (Rowlands & Gregory 2000). Only the seventh

Plate 1. Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, Sohar, Oman. (*Dennis Buisson*)

record in Lebanon of the latter species was of four at Cheikh Zennad, on 14 April. On 20 September the third **Three-banded Plover** *C. tricollaris* in Egypt and the Western Palearctic was at Wadi El Natrun. A first-winter **Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* was at Koomy fishponds, in the eastern Jezreel Valley, Israel, on 25 September. Nine **Dotterel** *Charadrius morinellus* were at Sultan marshes, Turkey, on 12 November. A **White-tailed Plover** *Chettusia leucura* was present at Van Gölü, Turkey, on 11 September. The second to sixth records of this species in Armenia were all at Armash fish ponds as follows: one on 9 May 1999, up to 5 pairs on 31 May 1999, seven on 11 June 1999, three, including one apparently on a nest, on 23 May 2000, and a pair on 6 June 2000. This species is clearly breeding, or attempting to do so, at this site, which provides probably the only suitable habitat in the country. The 14th record of **Sociable Plover** *C. gregaria* in UAE was of one, at Fujairah National Dairy Farm, on 9 November, while the 16–17th records of **Long-toed Stint** *Calidris subminuta* were of singles at the Emirates golf course, on 1 November, and at Khor Kalba, on 1 December. Exceptional shorebird records from Oman, which have all been accepted by the national committee, included the third **Pectoral Sandpiper** *C. melanotos* at Sun Farms, Sohar, on 6 June; the first **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *C. acuminuta* at Khawr Taqah, on 11 February (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000); the eighth record of **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media* involving two at Hilf, Masirah, on 12 October; and the sixth **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Sohar, between 19 October and 25 December. Another significant Great Snipe record was of one at Ras al-Bassit, Syria, on 28 April. A **Pintail Snipe** *Gallinago stenura* at Sabkha al Fasl, Saudi Arabia, on 2 June, was a relatively unseasonal report. The second **Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica* in Lebanon was reported at Aammiq marsh, on 15 September. Apparently the only recent report anywhere in the world of the globally threatened **Slender-billed Curlew** *Numenius tenuirostris* concerned three at Sudochie Lake, Uzbekistan, in April. Single **Terek Sandpipers** *Xenus cinereus* were observed at Cheikh Zennad, on 18 July and 5 August, only the second and third records in Lebanon. In Oman, there were four **Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicaria* at Montasar, on 20 September, the ninth country record (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000). A **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudaus* reported off the Fujairah Hilton, on 24–25 March, was potentially the seventh record in UAE, if accepted; a **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*, at the same locality, on 6 September, would also be a seventh record if confirmed. A significant count of 36 **Audouin's Gull** *Larus audouinii* was made at Karaburun, Turkey, on 27 January 2001. A **Common Gull** *L. canus* at Seeb, Oman, on 8 January, has been accepted by the country's records committee as the sixth record (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000). On 3 February 2001 there was a first-winter **Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* offshore at Iğneada, Turkey, the first country record for a couple of years, and three juveniles were off Tel-Aviv, Israel, on 4 February 2001. Two **Sooty Tern** *Sterna fuscata* were on Masirah Island, on 5 June. Another new breeding species for Arabia was confirmed in June, again from Kuwait, where a pair of **White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus*, with three almost fully young, was seen by a nest, at Jahra East Outfall (Gregory & Robertson 2000).

A remarkable six **Hume's Tawny Owl** *Strix butleri* were present at Jebel Samhan, Oman, on 6 February; until relatively recently the species was unknown from the south-east corner of Arabia and this is the highest ever count there (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000). There are very few previous records of **Stock Dove** *Columba oenas* in the Arabian Peninsula, thus one at Al Wathba camel track, UAE, on 9 November was a significant observation (and the first country record); also there, on 6–12 October was the sixth national record, if accepted, of **Rufous Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis*. Another of the latter species, a juvenile of the

subspecies *meena* was at Kibbutz Lotan, south Israel, on 1–7 November, but apparently exhibited evidence of having escaped from captivity. Three Stock Doves were also sighted at Aammiq marsh, Lebanon on 17 October and one was there on 24 October. A visit to south-west Saudi Arabia in late September produced totals of 12 and ten of the rare and localised **Olive Pigeon** *Columba arquatrix* at Jabal Soudah and Wadi Maraba. Two **Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* were at Sharm el Sheikh, south Sinai, on 24–25 September. In Kuwait there were records of **Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* as follows: one at Jahra on 15 March, two at Sabah al-Salem on 30 March and one dead at Tulha on 19 April. In Saudi Arabia there were singles of **White breasted Kingfisher** *Halcyon smyrnensis* at Al Hair, Riyadh, on 26 January 2001 and Yanbu al-Sinaiyah the previous day; the species is rare inland in Arabia, while one near Baltim, Lake Burullus, on 4 April, is the first record from the northern Nile Delta, Egypt, and a significant intra-country range extension. Following the spate of recent novel lark records in the country (see *Sandgrouse* 22: 158), there was five **Dunn's Lark** *Eremalauda dunni* at NW Kuwait DMZ, on 12 May, a new record count of 224 **Bar-tailed Desert Lark** *Ammomanes cincturus* between Ratqa and Al Abraq, on 17 November, and single **Small Skylarks** *Alauda gulgula* at Jahra East Outfall, on 31 October and at Subiya, on 14 November. The Oman Bird Records Committee has recently accepted more of the latter species; all were at Sohar, four on 6 January to 23 February, two on 23 February and two again on 1 December. There are only five records in the country (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000). In Israel, where the species is more regular, there were singles at Yotvata, on 30 October–7 November, in the Hula Valley, on 3 November, and at Kfar Ruppin, on 3–5 January 2001, with three at Eilat, on 18 November; up to three **Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus rubescens* were in the same area during 7 November and 6 January 2001. The fourth and fifth UAE records of **Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra* were made this autumn, singles at Dubai pivot fields, on 24–27 November, and Fujairah National Dairy Farm, on 1 December. Three **Woodlark** *Lullula arborea* at El Salam Farm, El Arish on 6 December 1999, was approximately the 20th record in Egypt. The first **Shore Lark** *Eremophila alpestris* in Jordan was at Dana on 27 March, while **Temminck's Horned Lark** *E. bilopha* continues to be recorded in the northern Bekaa, Lebanon. More extraordinary hirundine reports from the UAE, following those mentioned in the last issue (*Sandgrouse* 22: 159), involved more **Brown-throated Sand Martin** *Riparia paludicola*, a single at Al Wathba camel track, on 15 September, followed by two in the same place on 20–26 October and 24 November–3 December, the 5–7th records if accepted, but more remarkable was the first Middle Eastern report of **Streak-throated Swallow** *Hirundo fluvicola*, at the same hotspot, from 22 December until at least 8 January 2001, when it was joined by a second individual (*Birding World* 14: 11). In south-east Turkey there was an exceptionally unseasonal report of a **Barn Swallow** *H. rustica* at an unspecified location on 31 December. A **Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* at El Tur Farm, south Sinai, on 25 September 1999, was a rare report from Egypt, while there were also a number of further reports from Lebanon, all at Aammiq marsh, three in April and singles on 29 August and 15–16 September. An **Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* was at Sharm el Sheikh, Sinai, on 15 November. **African Pied Wagtail** *M. aguimp* continues to be seen at Abu Simbel, its toehold in the Western Palearctic; six were present on 30 September. Among the host of rarities in UAE, single **Forest Wagtails** *Dendronanthus indicus* in Safa Park and Abu Dhabi, in November, appear almost usual!

A **Radde's Accentor** *Prunella ocularis* at Lotan, on 22 November, is the southernmost-ever record in Israel. The eighth UAE record, if accepted, of **Pied Stonechat** *Saxicola caprata* was of one at Fujairah national Dairy farm, from 17 November until at least 4 January 2001, and apparently the fifth in Israel was at Shizzafon, in late October (*Birding World* 14: 39). In Oman the third **Finsch's Wheatear** *Oenanthe finschii* was at Sohar, on 21 March (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000), and, in Lebanon, there was a **Desert Wheatear** *O. deserti* at El Qaa, on 30 September. A male **Eastern Pied Wheatear** *O. picata* beside the road between Hermel and Qaa, on 2 December, would be the first record for Lebanon if documented. In Dubai pivot fields, on 29 December, there was a **Ring Ouzel** *Turdus torquatus*, only the seventh record in UAE if accepted. The **Dusky Thrush** *T. naumanni eumonus*, at Ghaba Resthouse, Oman, mentioned in the previous compilation (*Sandgrouse* 22: 159) was present from 18 February to 6 March and has now been accepted as the second record (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000).

Following the two spring reports, there was another **River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis* claimed in UAE; one at Al Wathba, on 15 September, would be the sixth national record if accepted. In Oman, there was a singing **Savi's Warbler** *L. luscinioides* at Qurm Nature Reserve, on 4–6 January, the seventh country record (Eriksen & Sargaent 2000). **Moustached Warbler** *Acrocephalus melanopogon* was again present at Jubail Industrial City, Saudi Arabia, on 4 May to 15 July at least, with nest-material collection observed. A **Paddyfield Warbler** *A. agricola* at Thumrait, Oman, on 14 October was the fourth national record. Following three records of this species in Armenia in 1995, two of which referred to breeding, further reports from the same area, Armash fish ponds, include at least four singing males of a total of eight, on 23 May, up to 15 there, on 6 June 2000, and at least nine, on 14th September. Both **European Reed** *A. scirpaceus* and **Great Reed Warblers** *A. arundinaceus* were confirmed breeding at Jahra East Outfall, Kuwait, on 12 June, when two **Basra Reed Warbler** *A. griseldis* were present at the same site. The second **Booted Warbler** *Hippolais caligata* in Lebanon was at Aammiq marsh, on 21 April. A male **Cyprus Warbler** *Sylvia melanothorax* observed, on 30 March, at Göksu delta, south Turkey, is the fourth country record, while a female was at Azraq, Jordan, on 30 March, and a first-winter male **Ménétries's Warbler** *S. mystacea* at Yotvata, Israel, on 16–20 November was preceded by three in Jordan in late March. There was a **Green Warbler** *Phylloscopus nitidus* on Arzanah Island, on 19–22 November; the fifth record in UAE if accepted. A **Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler** *P. humei* was in Eilat cemetery, on 10 November, with the third or fourth Egyptian record being at Ain Sukhna, on 18 November (*Birding World* 14: 11), and several **Yellow-browed Warbler** *P. inornatus* were reported in southern Israel in autumn/winter 2000/2001; there was also one of the latter 40 km south of Ras Sudr, Sinai, on 18 October. A **Red-breasted Flycatcher** *Ficedula parva* was also present at the latter locality on 18–21 October. The sixth **Semi-collared Flycatcher** *F. semitorquata* in Lebanon was at Aana, on 17 April. Following the first national record in 1999 (*Sandgrouse* 22: 159), a **Common Babbler** *Turdoides caudatus* was present at Zour, Kuwait, all year and was seen carrying twigs on 28 April. Up to 25 **Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus* were at Doha South Reserve, Kuwait, on 1 December, while two at Abassa in the Nile Delta, on 12 December 1999, were approxi-

mately the 15th record in Egypt..

A **Steppe Grey Shrike** *Lanius (excubitor) pallidirostris* in the eastern Zvulun valley, on 2 January 2001, is the first winter record of this form in Israel, while a Great Grey Shrike in Thrace, on 18 February 2001, was a rare Turkish report, and another *pallidirostris* was apparently present at Paphos Lighthouse, Cyprus, from 7 December until at least the end of January 2001 (*Birding World* 14: 11). An adult male **Isabelline Shrike** *L. isabellinus* was at Aammiq marsh, on 15 November–27 December; a record nine individuals of this species wintered in Israel in 2000/2001. Rare reports of **Rose-coloured Starling** *Sturnus roseus* in Kuwait involved one at Wafra Oil Field, on 9 August, and seven at Jahra Farms, on 24 August. A first-summer Rose-coloured Starling at Wadi Rum, on 25–26 March, was approximately the fourth record in Jordan. Also in Kuwait there was up to seven **Bank Mynah** *Acridotheres ginginianus* at Jahra Farms, on 11 June. An immature **Common Mynah** *A. tristis* at Sharm el Sheikh sewage farm, on 28 March, is the second record in Egypt and follows relatively 'hot-on-the-heels' of the first (Millington 2000). A **Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* reported at Eilat, on 1 October, would, if accepted, be approximately the ninth Israeli record and the first in the south. **Yellow-throated Sparrow** *Petronia xanthocollis* has recently been confirmed to breed in Kuwait; a pair with young still in the nest was discovered on 1 June (Chichester & Gregory 2000), while **Indian Silverbill** *Euodice malabarica* also appears to be establishing itself in the country, a maximum of seven was at Zour, on 2 November. Neither **Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* or **Siskin** *Carduelis spinus* is recorded annually in Kuwait, but singles of both species were near Jahra, on 10 November. Arthur Stagg (*in litt.* 2000) has drawn my attention to his records of breeding **Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* in Saudi Arabia, around Tabuk in March–June 1990, which pre-date the report by Jennings (1999). Following the belated report of **Redpoll** *C. flammea* in Israel (*Sandgrouse* 22: 160) another was reported at Mamshit, in the central Negev, on 8 November; if accepted it would be the first in Israel. **Yemen Serin** *Serinus menachensis* continues to be recorded in Omani Dhofar, with records at Tawi Attair in March and October when several young were seen (*Phoenix* 17: 19). Two pairs of **Desert Finch** *Rhodopechys obsoleta* at El Salhaya Reclamation in the Nile Delta, on 31 March, is the first record from mainland Africa; there are fewer than ten previous records in Egypt, all from the Sinai peninsula. Two **Pine Buntings** *Emberiza leucocephalus* arrived at Aammiq marsh, Lebanon, on 18 November, where the species has only recently been discovered to winter. Passage **Cinereous Buntings** *E. cineracea* were recorded in Kuwait, with 1–2 at Zour, on 30 March, and another at Qaisat, on 23 September, and Oman, where there was four on the Sayh Plateau, on 6 April, with one at Khasab on the following day. In Israel there was a female/juvenile **Rustic Bunting** *E. rustica* at Givat Mordechay orchards, on 4 November. Rare buntings reported in autumn from UAE included the 15th **Little Bunting** *E. pusilla*, at Al Wathba camel track, on 12 December–15 January 2001, the third country record of **Yellow-breasted Bunting** *E. aureola* at the same locality, on 6–27 October, and also there a **Reed Bunting** *E. schoeniclus* on 13 December.

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Guy M. Kirwan, 74 Waddington Street, Norwich NR2 4JS, U. K.

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